# A New Pentecost: Vatican II in the Archdiocese of Boston

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**April 24, 2018**
**Senior Honors Thesis- History**

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# Introduction

**"I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you."**
**Ezekiel 36:26**

Seminarian Dennis Sheehan had spent two years at the North American College in Rome. The fact that he had been chosen to pursue his theological studies at the heart of the Church was a sure sign that he was on the fast-track to promotion in his home Archdiocese of Boston. Now, in 1962 he felt fortunate to be present in the Eternal City for a momentous event, the Second Vatican Council. Pope John XXIII had shocked the world three years earlier when he had announced he would be hosting an Ecumenical Council, the twenty-first in the Church's history. At first the pace of the Council's events would be "dizzying" for Sheehan. Hundreds of bishops and theologians from around the world were congregated in Rome. The result of their decisions over the next three years would have a transformative effect on the Church, and drastically change the Catholic Church in Boston.[1]

[1] Fr. Dennis Sheehan, interview with the author, Regina Cleri Priest's Home (Boston), October 2017.

The reforms of the Second Vatican Council as implemented in the Archdiocese of Boston would result in the birth of a new Catholic culture there. This would help to resolve tensions which lay at the heart of the American Catholic Church by settling questions of theology and practice which had made Catholicism antithetical in many ways to the liberal, modern, and Protestant cultural milieu of the United States. The majority Protestant population had long been uncomfortable with the nation's Catholic minority. Catholics worshipped in Latin, a dead language, and performed extravagant rites at their Sunday services. They maintained that theirs was the one true Church, and that membership was necessary for salvation. The Church's most egregious stand, in the eyes of American Protestant critics, was its condemnation of both the concepts of separation of Church and state and religious freedom. These were particularly difficult positions to hold in the pluralist United States, where establishment of a state Church was explicitly banned in the Constitution and citizens were guaranteed the right to practice religion, or not, as they pleased. Boston's Archbishop, Cardinal Richard Cushing, would enthusiastically embrace the reforms promulgated by the Council. These changes to Catholic practice and teaching would address each of the aforementioned challenges the Catholic Church faced from the surrounding American culture. By the end of the Conciliar period in 1970, the result would be the creation of a Church which had been "Americanized" in practice, and the birth of a new Catholic culture in the Archdiocese of Boston.

Cardinal Cushing would be at the center of this period of rapid transformation, leading the liberalizing reform from his Chancellery in Boston. He directed the implementation of a new Mass in the Archdiocese, celebrated in the vernacular and with far lass pomp than the pre-Vatican II Latin Mass. He reached out to build relationships with Protestants in the hopes of

contributing to the creation of a reunited Christian church. At the Council he would argue for a right to religious freedom to be enshrined as Catholic doctrine. Cushing believed that these reforms would lead to a new Pentecost, hearkening back to the day on which the Holy Spirit had descended upon the Apostles following the Ascension of Jesus. This feast day, celebrated in Springtime, was considered a commemoration of the foundation of the Catholic Church. The Apostles, inspired by the Holy Spirit, were granted a burst of energy and power to spread the faith and rejuvenate society. Cushing thought that the reforms of the Vatican Council would inaugurate a similar rebirth of Catholic culture and practice in his own Archdiocese.

The liberalizing direction of the reforms of Vatican II began with Pope John XXIII, who hoped they would lead to an *aggiornamento*, or updating of Church teaching. In the Archdiocese of Boston, Cardinal Cushing pursued this same agenda. Its narrative managed to capture the minds of many of Boston's clergy, especially of younger priests and nuns. The Catholic Church has always been a hierarchical organization, with teaching and authority flowing from the Pope in Rome, down to the Bishops among the world's dioceses, and from there to the priests, nuns and religious who served in the parishes, schools, and religious institutions within their local diocese. Through these local figures within each diocese, Rome's will would be passed on to the laity who composed an overwhelming majority of the Church's membership. Two narratives of how the reforms of Vatican II were presented to the laity have been proposed, and it is one of the contested points surrounding the Council. In one version, reforms came from the bottom up and reflected the desires of the laity for an accommodation of the Church with the modern world. In the other telling of the story, unwanted reforms were

forced upon an unsuspecting laity, leading to discontent and a rapid decline in faith and practice in the West, where reforms had been most radical.

Both of these narratives are partially correct. This paper argues that the reforms of Vatican II as implemented in the Archdiocese of Boston were radical and did proceed from the local hierarchy down to the laity. This lead to discontent and confusion among parishioners in a 1960s decade which was destined to be a turbulent time for Catholics regardless of whether there had been a major ecumenical Council, due to the effects of the Vietnam War, the sexual revolution, and other social movements of the time. Nevertheless, the Boston laity were comfortable trusting their leaders in the Church hierarchy, and did not question Vatican II reforms or rebel against their implementation. Despite discomfort and disorientation with the jarring pace and extent of reform, they quickly adjusted themselves to change. Doctrinal confusion did reign during this time, and both church attendance and practice declined. But, at the end of this period those who remained were able to participate in a Catholicism which was much more aligned with the reigning values of the American society in which they lived.

This paper demonstrates the affinity of the younger clergy of the Archdiocese of Boston for the reforms of Vatican II. Almost all of the young priests ordained between 1960 and 1970 would become avid partisans of the Council's most progressive reforming movements. Nuns and other religious who entered the Church during this time experienced a similar phenomenon. Despite this fact, few of these men and women began their vocations with grandiose goals of reforming the Catholic Church. Most were joining a conservative and traditional institution, with the apparent desire to continue following these principles in their own service to the Church. This paper argues that it was the way in which the Council was

filtered to them by the local hierarchy as a "New Pentecost", meaning a time of new energy and new freedom, which excited their enthusiasm for the Council. In this atmosphere, they would define new ways of living as priests and nuns in service to the Church. Their methods would be aligned to a more modern focus on political action and public service, rejecting the traditional concentration of the Catholic Church on spiritual matters and morality.

## The Second Vatican Council

Pope John XXIII's reasons for calling a council remain shrouded in mystery. At the time, he told members of the Curia, the central governing body of the Church, that the idea had come to him as a divine spark.[2] Previous Councils had been called to face crises in the Church, such as disputes over points of doctrine or the challenges produced by events such as the Protestant Reformation. The most recent church council, Vatican I, had been called in the midst of the liberal European Revolutions of the 19th century. During that time, the Catholic Church was often considered an enemy by democratic, nationalist, or socialist reformers who were hoping to overturn the aristocratic and traditional structures which had dominated European life since the Middle Ages. In response to this, then Pope Pius IX had called a Council of bishops from across the world to discuss these matters and the church's response. Vatican I left many of the issues of Church-State relations which had arisen because of these new political movements unresolved due to its abrupt end when Italian nationalist forces captured Rome, then the capital of a personal fiefdom ruled by the Pope, forcing the participants to flee.[3]

[2] John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2010), 17.
[3] Owen Chadwick, *History of the Popes, 1830-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 214.

Despite this, the Popes of the later 19th and early 20th centuries produced a series of documents, up through the 1950s, making clear that the Church held a hostile position towards many aspects of the new world then taking shape. The Church's condemnation extended across a vast array of political, social, intellectual and theological movements such as nationalism, communism, theological modernism, scientism, religious freedom, and many elements of liberalism.[4] The hierarchy of the Church remained rigidly opposed to these aspects of modern society, even up to the time of the Second Vatican Council. However, there were individual priests and scattered intellectual movements composed of Catholics which anticipated reform and also hoped to come to an accommodation with modernity. It was the ideas held by these individuals which would come to dominate the Second Vatican Council. Followers of this school were well organized at Vatican II and received the backing of Pope John XXIII.

The Second Vatican Council is and was the defining event of the Catholic Church in the modern world. The reforms which Vatican II called to be implemented across the global Church would be based upon texts produced by the Council Fathers, the bishops from around the world and their theological advisers, lower ranking clergy expert in various aspects of Catholic teaching. The sixteen documents promulgated by the Council did not include specific reforms. Instead, they provided guidelines to be followed and set a tone for change in the Church. Most were compromise documents which allowed both conservative and liberal prelates to read their own meaning into them. This was a cause of much conflict, during the Council itself and

[4] Examples include the 1864 *Syllabus of Errors* which condemned the notion that*, "*The Roman Pontiff can, and ought to, reconcile himself, and come to terms with, progress, liberalism and modern civilization." Other examples are the 1925 *Quas primas* which declared the whole of society's obligations to Christian. Later encyclicals include the 1950 *Anni Sacri* a "program for combatting atheistic communism" and *Humani Generis* which condemned aspects of contemporary Catholic theology as too liberal.

even more so in the following years and decades. It would lead the meaning of the Council to be contested among Catholics, even to the present day.

The contested nature of the Council has had a major impact on the interpretations of Vatican II in scholarly literature. Much has been written on the event of Vatican II itself, but works on the Council can often be problematic due to the the ideological commitments of their authors. Disagreements over the correct interpretation of the documents of the Second Vatican Council lead to divergent accounts of Vatican II and its aftermath. Due to the sharp decline in Catholic practice in the West following the event itself, another challenge is that many authors point a sharp finger at the Council as the chief cause of this drop in Church attendance and Catholic practice.

Since the earliest days of the Council, the global Church has become factionalized over its proper meaning and interpretation. Three main schools of thought are discernible: the liberals, the conservatives, and the traditionalists. The school which dominates academic publishing on the Council is the Liberals, and they write most positively about the event and its aftermath. Their views are well presented in *What Happened at Vatican II*, written by Boston College Professor John O'Malley, a Jesuit priest. Liberal accounts of the Council generally portray the reforms instituted following Vatican II as necessary and inevitable changes.[5] They are also comfortable with portraying the Second Vatican Council as a break with the prior Catholic tradition. Liberals argue that that the Tridentine Church, which was formed during the

[5] Similar works to O'Malley's include *A Brief History of Vatican II* by Italian historian Giussepi Alberigo. A book from this school which deals with the Council's implementation in the American context is *The American Catholic Revolution* by Professor Mark Massa S.J.
Giussepi Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006); Mark Massa, *The American Catholic Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)

Counter-Reformation period of the 16th century and continued up to the Second Vatican Council, needed to modernize and adjust to contemporary society if the Catholic Church hoped to stay relevant. O'Malley's book explains the key details of what occurred at the Council while maintaining a progressive attitude towards change in the Church. This remains the most popular account of Vatican II in America today. However, this paper takes issue with O'Malley's idea of inevitable progress proceeding from the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. There was nothing historically inevitable about the form which changes to the Mass and Catholic teaching following the Council took. Rather they were the result of contingent choices made by powerful members of the Church's hierarchy to present the Council in a liberal way, as a necessary break with previous tradition.

Interestingly, liberals and traditionalists, the most strongly opposed forces ideologically within the Church do agree on one thing: that Vatican Two was a break with the tradition of the Church which came before it. In contrast to liberals, traditionalists believe that this was a disaster and that a return to prior Church practice is necessary. Australian historian Geoffrey Hull's book, *The Banished Heart: Origins of Heteropraxis in the Catholic Church,* tackles the Council from this traditionalist viewpoint.[6] He is fascinated by the fact that the Catholic Church was able to implement drastic change in Catholic life and worship within such a short period of time. During the ten years following the calling of the Second Vatican Council, massive changes were made to the Mass, to Catholic teaching on Protestants and non-Christians, in seminary

[6] Other books in this school include *Iota Unum* by Italian professor Romano Amerio, a critique of the reforms produced by the Council. Another Italian professor, Roberto de Mattei, wrote *The Second Vatican Council-An Unwritten Story* which tells the same story as Fr. O'Malley but from a traditionalist perspective
Romano Amerio, *Iota Unum* (Kansas City, MO: Sarto House, 1996); Roberto de Mattei, The Second Vatican Council-An Unwritten Story (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications, 2012); Geoffrey Hull, *The Banished Heart: Origins of Heteropraxis in the Catholic Church* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010).

education, and in the Church's approach to politics. Hull seeks potential causal factors for this deep in Catholic history. This paper asks a similar question but places it in a more localized context and within a shorter time-frame. Hull analyzes developments in Catholic worship across hundreds of years of history, arguing that the reforms to Catholic practice following Vatican II were only possible due to a centuries-long attitude shift which had led to increasing centralization of Church leadership in Rome following the Counter-Reformation. The papacy, inflated with a new ability to implement reform by fiat, was thus able to institute the sweeping changes to the Mass and Catholic life which occurred in the 1960's.

While Hull makes some noteworthy insights, this paper argues that the implementation of the reforms would have been impossible if Vatican II had not been called. If Pope John XXIII had never called a Council, the Church would not have organically opted for change. Centralization of Church authority in Rome had maintained a very rigid, conservative Church for centuries, and it was only the person of Pope John XXIII and the influence of certain liberal Council Fathers who came to dominate the event which led reform to take place in the liberalizing manner in which it did. Like O'Malley, Hull makes the case that the reforms of Vatican II were inevitable due to the trajectory the Catholic Church had been on since the Counter-Reformation. This paper holds that the project of reforming the Church in a radical way had few deeper roots in earlier Catholic tradition, and the reforms which occurred due to Vatican II were not the inherent result of church centralization which had occurred in the 17$^{th}$ century but were rather historically contingent events which relied upon the organization and influence of liberal Catholic reformers.

Conservatives maintain a middle-ground between traditionalists and progressives. They are the only school which does not see a necessary break between the pre-Conciliar Church and the post-Vatican Two Church.[7] Conservatives agree with many of documents promulgated by the Second Vatican Council, and support reforms which led to changes such as a new Mass in the vernacular. However, most conservatives believe that the results of Vatican II are largely negative due to a "hijacking" of the Council by liberals who implemented radical changes to Catholic practice by referencing a mythical "spirit of Vatican II" to justify their actions.

This paper attempts to step outside of the boundaries of all three schools and write on the implementation of the Council's reforms as they happened within the Archdiocese of Boston without taking a stance a stance on its theological position within Roman Catholicism. , This paper does not attempt to sort out the questions of theological continuity or rupture between the Tridentine and Vatican II Church which dominate much of the literature on the subject. It reports on why the reforms happened the way they did and how people reacted to them in this local setting.

Even more importantly, this paper addresses the Council within a local context, a largely neglected avenue of analysis of Vatican II. Only one book has been published that addresses the reforms at the diocesan-level within the United States.[8] One of the significant outcomes of Vatican II was an increase in the diversity of teaching, worship and practice even within

[7] A conservative account of the Council has been written by American scholars Matthew Lamb and Matthew Levering titled *Vatican II: Renewal Within Tradition* which makes the case that the Second Vatican Council's reforms were compatible with prior Church teaching, but that excesses did result due to the "hijacking" of the Council.
Matthew Lamb and Matthew Levering, *Vatican II: Renewal Within Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[8] Matthew Kelly, *The Transformation of American Catholicism* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).

individual American dioceses. Influenced by their ethnic, socioeconomic, and political background, and even more importantly the theological leanings of their local clergy, very different results could be produced within individual dioceses across the United States according to how welcoming their bishops and priests were to the reforms coming from Rome. While there was certainly some diversity in the pre-Vatican II American Church, it was not comparable to the vast divergences which would result, even from parish to parish within dioceses after the event.

The one book that has studied the implementation of the Council from the perspective of an American dioceses is *The Transformation of American Catholicism* by historian Timothy Kelly. Professor Kelly is of the liberal school. In this book he tells the story of the implementation of the Vatican II reforms within the Diocese of Pittsburgh. While the Archdiocese of Boston was a much more prominent one at this time with more than twice as many Catholics and three times as many priests during the Conciliar period, Kelly makes arguments which are relevant in the Boston context as well. Kelly is a believer in the bottom-up approach to Vatican II and argues that the laity of Pittsburgh had anticipated and initiated the reforms of the Vatican Council in the years before and during the Conciliar period. In his narrative Vatican II is not a catalyst for change. Rather, Kelly argues that reforms were put into action to keep up with grass-roots movements among the laity which were then responded to by priests and bishops in the Church hierarchy. It is doubtful whether this is the case even within the Diocese of Pittsburgh, due to the rigidly hierarchical nature of the American Catholic Church as a whole during this time, and this paper argues that in Boston the pace and style of reform was the result of Cardinal Cushing and the clergy.

Manifesting one of the central arguments of this thesis, the paper proceeds in three sections. It works its way down along the Church's hierarchical structure in the Archdiocese of Boston, and ends with the laity's reception and ultimate acceptance of the reforms. Cardinal Cushing is introduced in the first chapter. He would lead Boston from the end of World War II until the end of the Conciliar period at his death in 1970. During this time, the Archdiocese would be radically transformed. A liberal in the Catholic theological sense, as an American Cushing held typical American views on subjects such as church-state relations. This section shows how Cushing's own beliefs about the theological questions introduced by Vatican II shaped his response to the event. It was his liberal views on the questions of the liturgy, ecumenism, and religious freedom which would give the reforms of Vatican II their progressive direction in the Archdiocese of Boston. Cushing would orchestrate the spread of the liberal narrative of the Council through the introduction of liberal speakers and curriculum at the seminary of St. John and among the parishes of the Archdiocese. In his own actions Cardinal Cushing would also shape the narrative of Vatican II. In particular, he embraced the most debated aspects of the Council's reforms which are the focus of much of this paper: the ecumenical movement and the question of religious liberty, as well as the reforms to the Catholic Mass. In general Cushing would support the new spirit of understanding and openness to the modern world which he saw as the Council's primary goal. This would lead to dissent and rebellion within the Archdiocese itself, as Cushing's vision of reform, while radical for its time, would not be enough to satisfy all of his priests.

In the second chapter, this paper chronicles the experiences of priests, and to a lesser extent, nuns in the Archdiocese of Boston during this time. While the Cardinal ran the

Archdiocese, most lay Catholics only had regular interaction with their parish priests and the nuns who served at local parochial schools. The Council would become the defining life event for many of the priests of the Archdiocese of Boston, changing the way they lived their vocation. The reforms of the Council opened up new ways of serving as priests and nuns, and those of the younger generation were often eager to embrace this. This was particularly manifested in a reformed styles of worship, the new Catholic Mass in the vernacular. It was also evident in many endeavors meant to reach out to people from other faiths in a spirit of dialogue. This new priesthood and new religious life also encompassed more active involvement in local politics and in social justice movements. Not all priests were in favor of these changes, which led to tensions between conservative and liberal priests, but in the end a majority went along with the reforms. The tumult opened up during this period would lead to a mass exodus from the priesthood and from the convent, as hundreds in the Archdiocese left the religious life from the time of the Council into the 1970s.

In the final chapter, the jarring effect of reforms on the laity is meant to be evoked through an analysis of the Catholic Mass, and how this central rite of the Church was utterly transformed during the 1960's as a result of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. The laity play a mainly passive role in this story, relegated by the nature of the Catholic Church's hierarchical structure to a secondary role in directing reform in the Church. This section explains the laity's reaction to the Council, explaining how it was proposed not only by their Church leaders but also by the secular and Catholic media as a positive event. Many aspects of Catholicism beloved by the laity, such as the traditional Latin mass and distinctive cultural practices such as abstinence from meat on Fridays, would be abolished during this time period.

However, the reforms to the Church also made the institution more "modern", and while the laity had not been clamoring for reform in the pre-Vatican II Church, those who remained would quickly become accustomed to the new Catholic culture in the Archdiocese. This new Catholicism was much more aligned with the values of the American society around them, and with the Protestant faith of many of their neighbors. A large number of Catholics would not remain, as Church membership and practice faced a sharp decline during this time from which it has never recovered. This paper does not seek to point to the reforms of Vatican II as the only factor motivating this drop. Rather, the Vietnam War, the sexual revolution, and other cultural and political movements of the 1960s also contributed to this change, but the influence of these events and movements is outside of the scope of this paper.

Vatican II occurred only fifty years ago and many of the players who served important roles in implementing the Council's reforms are alive today. To write this paper I relied heavily upon interviews with priests and nuns who lived during this turbulent period in Archdiocesan history. In particular, I was able to speak with retired priests at Regina Cleri Priest's Home in Boston and with Sisters of St. Joseph living in Medford. The similarities in each of their narratives were striking, and it is evident that the Second Vatican Council was a transformative time in all of their lives. For most it was the defining moment of their priesthood or religious life as nuns. Outside of these first-person sources, I was also able to access the Archdiocese of Boston's Archives, located in the Braintree headquarters of the Archdiocese. Here I viewed documents produced during the Conciliar period by the hierarchy. The *Boston Globe* was an important source, as it was the most important secular newspaper in the Archdiocese of Boston. The *Pilot,* the Archdiocese's own newspaper which circulated in parishes throughout

the area, also provided valuable insight into the period. Most studies of Vatican II have lacked the voice and immediacy which interviewing the priests and nuns who lived through the era provides. It was a very rewarding experience and I am grateful for having had the opportunity to speak with them.

# Chapter 1: The Cardinal and the Council

## Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the people also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church" – St. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Smyrnaens, 107 AD

### The Seminary Revolt

Tensions began brewing at St. John's seminary in Brighton in the months following the opening of the Second Vatican Council. While the seminarians had limited access to the outside world, the Archdiocesan hierarchy had made sure to provide them a regular series of speakers on campus to describe the events of the Council and explain its meaning. The speakers, exclusively from the liberal wing of the Church, spoke of radical developments occurring in Rome. They explained that a new spirit of freedom and openness was coming to the fore within the Church. Following the close of the Council on March 22, 1966, Cardinal Cushing himself arrived at the seminary as part of a "series of open meetings with the curates of the Archdiocese" to discuss the reforms of Vatican II in a "spirit of collegiality."[9] The Cardinal was an avid partisan of the liberalizing reforms of the Council. His presence on campus had excited the seminarians, who were in sympathy with his plans to reform St. John's. However, for many his pace of change was not fast enough. To the Cardinal's horror a large group of seminarians began gathering outside the library where he was meeting with a group of priests. They had abandoned their classes that day, leaving their professors behind. Among the group of

[9] "Cardinal Begins Series of Meetings with Priests." *Boston Globe*, (Boston, MA), February 25, 1966.

seminarians one young man stood out, as he carried a makeshift sign reading, "We are men, not boys."[10]

The Cardinal had known of trouble brewing at St. John's. Many seminarians had been sending letters to his office complaining of the "atmosphere of dusty medievalism" and their own "lack of personal and academic freedom" at the seminary.[11] Despite this, he was shocked at the action of the March 22nd revolt, which violated one of the fundamental principles of the Church, obedience. To the seminarians however, their desire to speak with the Cardinal was not in fact disobedient. Rather, they were implementing the liberalizing vision of Vatican II which Cushing had spent the last few years promoting across the Archdiocese, since his return home from the first session of the Council. In fact, each of their letters to him "framed their complaints with reference to *aggiornamento*—the updating impulse of the Second Vatican Council."[12]

Controversy over the Council had erupted at the seminary before. Many aspects of life at St. John's had been reexamined while Vatican II was in session, by both faculty and seminarians, in the light of the documents and reforms coming from Rome. Debate could extend to topics which might seem trivial. An example of this was the struggle over the use of guitars during Mass which occurred at the seminary. Traditionally, such instruments had been banned during services. Now, following the Council, some young seminarians were eager to implement what they believed the Council Fathers had required through their liturgical reforms

[10] John Seitz, ""An Emotional History of Vatican II: Relationships at St. John's Seminary, Boston 1959-1971" in *Catholicism and Vatican II: A Global Reception and History* ed. Timothy Matovina, Kathleen Cummings, and Robert Orsi (London: Cambridge University Press, Forthcoming), 2.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., 3.

by using such instruments during Mass. However, the rector was opposed to this change. In a workaround solution, he had banned strumming of instruments during worship at the seminary. Dissent among the seminarians would lead this policy to quickly be changed. The seminarians argued that the use of guitars was in line with the Vatican II reforms, and the rector granted them use of the instrument during Mass.[13]

Many things which had been forbidden before might now be possible as a result of the Council. Its reforming spirit was in the air, and a period of freedom and change had been opened up in the Archdiocese. This seemed to have been the wish of Cardinal Cushing himself. He was furious over the revolt and had seven seminarians deemed leaders of the action expelled from St. John's.[14] Yet, his sympathy with the spirit of the seminarians could be seen in his own personal responses to the Second Vatican Council, which in 1966 had only recently concluded. Cushing had always "felt that Rome had much to learn from the practical wisdom of Americans."[15] In particular, his desire for ecumenical outreach and openness with peoples from other faiths and his belief in a reformed Mass were inspired by his particular attraction not only to the pluralism of his country, but also as a means to bring about an accommodation with the the majority Protestant population of the United States. The reforms he enacted would lead to the birth of a new Catholicism more amenable not only to modernity, but specifically to the broader American culture in which the Archdiocese was situated.

[13] Fr. Ed Carroll, interview with the author, Regina Cleri Priest's Home (Boston), October 2017.
[14] "Furor at St. John's." *Boston Globe*, (Boston, MA), April 10, 1966.
[15] Phil Lawler, *The Faithful Departed: The Collapse of Boston's Catholic Culture* (Boston: Encounter Books, 2010), 45.

## The Archdiocese of Boston

Cardinal Cushing's building of an Archdiocese that was American in its outlook was in direct contrast to the policy of his predecessor, Cardinal William O'Connell. In some matters, Cushing was cut from the same cloth as O'Connell. Both were Irish-Americans, and both pursued a policy of rapid institutional expansion during their time as Archbishop. Under each of them dozens of Catholic high schools, hospitals and churches were built. In the first half of Cushing's reign, before the Vatican Council, vocations to the priesthood and religious life would also skyrocket. By 1960 there were 5,543 nuns living in the Boston area and 1,153 priests serving almost 400 parish churches there. The Archdiocesan parochial school system was composed of 72 high schools and 211 elementary schools.[16] During this pre-Conciliar period the Catholic Church was partaking in the "post World War II church-going boom" which was occurring across the West, manifesting itself in widespread religiosity in Western Europe and America.[17] Pews were full to overflowing on Sundays and conversions to Catholicism were increasing in the developing world. The Archdiocese of Boston was experiencing all the most positive elements of these global patterns, necessitating the rapid expansion of the Church's presence throughout the Greater Boston area.

Under the guidance of Cardinal William O'Connell from the 1910s until the end of World War Two, the Church had been recognized as the local moral authority in the Boston area. O'Connell was a native of Boston, but had been trained and educated in Rome.[18] This led him to

[16] Thomas O'Connor, *Boston Catholics: A History of the Church and Its People* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 251-252.
[17] Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960's* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 58-59.
[18] O'Connor, *Boston Catholics*, 193.

diverge from many contemporary American bishops, theologically and aesthetically. He had risen fast in the Church by maintaining the Roman line during the Americanist crisis at the turn of the 19th century. He had sided with the Pope in disputes which occurred at that time between the Vatican and the American bishops over the Church's teaching on church-state relations. The Curia feared that the American church leadership had been infected with the liberal notions of their homeland in regards to religious freedom, and thus desired a separation of church and state to be applied across the Catholic nations of Europe. This foreboding would prove accurate a few decades later at the Second Vatican Council, when the American bishops overwhelmingly supported reform in this area. In contrast to most other American bishops, O'Connell had sided with Rome in this debate, which made him a favorite of the Pope and his closest advisers. Upon his return from the Eternal City in 1907, he was selected as Archbishop of Boston. He was later made a Cardinal, granting him the ability to participate in papal elections. He would live as a true prince of the Church, building a posh palace in the city, taking regular vacations to the Bahamas, celebrating ornate Masses in Boston's cathedral, and fostering a triumphalist pride among the city's Catholic population.

Cushing had also had the opportunity to study in Rome upon entering the seminary in 1915, but the danger of German U-Boat patrols to the Atlantic crossing due to World War One prevented him from making the journey, and he completed his studies in the United States.[19] This kept him from developing the conservative Roman attitudes which O'Connell had been known for, and which study in Rome was meant to inculcate in future Church leaders. Instead, Cushing stayed close to home, attending St. John's Seminary in Brighton not far from his

[19] Ibid., 242.

family's humble dwelling in the South End. He was the son of two Irish immigrants, and grew up in a poor, but hard-working and tight-knit family.[20] His American upbringing would remain a defining influence on Cushing's theological beliefs, and where his American values came into tension with his Catholic faith, he usually searched for a way to square the two ideologies.

The Cushings lived in an Irish-American enclave in Boston, and their lives were centered around social events and worship at their local church, St. Eulalia's.[21] Richard Cushing went to parochial schools for his education, and attended Boston College High School, a prestigious Jesuit-run institution in Dorchester. He considered joining the Society of Jesus at graduation in 1913, but instead opted for a year at Boston College before making his final decision to join the diocesan clergy, rather than a religious order such as the Jesuits. He attended St. John's Seminary in order to become a priest. While not a particularly gifted student, Cushing was a hard worker. After graduation he would make a name for himself as a fundraiser for the Catholic missions, raising money across the Archdiocese for missionaries serving the Church in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. His success in that role gained him recognition from Cardinal O'Connell, and in 1939 he was made a Monsignor and the auxiliary bishop of Boston. The two men developed a close relationship and Cushing was central to O'Connell's administration during the last years of his Cardinalate. Upon O'Connell's death in 1944 Cushing was his natural successor as Archbishop, as he had already taken over many of the day to day leadership roles of the aged Cardinal.[22]

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[20] John Henry Cutler, *Cardinal Cushing of Boston* (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1970), 1-9.
[21] Ibid., 19.
[22] O'Connor, *Boston Catholics,* 240-244.

Under the leadership of O'Connell, the Catholic church's moral and political power in Boston had reached an apex. He could make or break political initiatives due to the power his word had to influence the Catholic faithful of the Boston area. When Massachusetts Governor Michael James Curley attempted to institute a lottery in 1935, the support for this project was overwhelming in the state's House of Representatives. However, on May 20th, the date before the scheduled vote on the matter, O'Connell weighed in that he was opposed to the lottery due to the corruption and vice which he feared it would unleash upon the state. The next day the motion was defeated 187-40. The entire city of Boston knew that it had been the intervention of Cardinal O'Connell which led to the last minute failure and Curley was forced to give up his dream of a lottery.[23] Ten years later when Cushing came to the helm, the Archbishop of Boston maintained similar control within his jurisdiction, and the faithful were willing to follow their bishop's direction. It was this attitude of submissive obedience which would allow Cushing to implement his reforming vision of the Council. Always a believer in the constitutionally defined separation of church and state, Cushing would also be influenced by the reforms of Vatican II to take a different tack when it came to approaching the Church's role in politics.

It is ironic that by the time of Cushing's assumption of the role of Archbishop that Catholicism had become such a dominant force in the city, as the Puritan founders of Massachusetts were fanatically anti-Catholic, and had crossed the Atlantic in the hopes of escaping the "Romish Papism" they feared was polluting their native Church of England.[24] By the 1960s, Boston had developed one of the strongest Catholic identities in the country, yet in

[23] Lawler, *Faithful Departed,*1.
[24] Ibid., 22.

many ways the Church remained a new part of the city's culture. It had a sparse institutional presence in the New England area before the 17th century when its earliest adherents were mainly French-Canadians. This ethnic aspect of Boston's Catholic culture would soon be overwhelmed in the early 1800s, when tens of thousands of Irish Catholics began immigrating to Boston en masse.[25] They brought their faith with them, and quickly came to dominate the local Catholic hierarchy. Slowly the Irish would gain political control over the area encompassed by the diocese as well. This was met with hostility on the part of the Boston's native Protestant population. Anti-Catholic feelings sometimes led to violence and distrust between the two groups, a situation which would continue into the early decades of the 20th century, only cooling with the onset of Vatican II.

Growing up in Salem during the 1930s and 40s, a future Catholic priest remembered that his neighborhood was *de facto* segregated between old Yankee Protestant families and Irish Catholics, a situation familiar in many parts of the state.[26] Anti-Catholic feelings in Boston had in the past sometimes erupted into violence, such as in 1834, when a Protestant mob burned down an Ursuline convent in the city.[27] The disdain for Catholicism felt by much of Boston's Protestant population would help the vehemently anti-Catholic Know-Nothing party sweep to power across the state of Massachusetts in the 1850s.[28] In the 1940s many of the city's elite institutions, such as Harvard, remained bastions of Protestant hegemony. Theologically among the local Protestant denominations anti-Catholic sentiment remained high

[25] Ibid., 24-25.
[26] Fr. John O'Donnell, interview with the author, Regina Cleri Priest's Home (Boston), October 2017.
[27] O'Connor, *Boston Catholics,* 64-65.
[28] Ibid., pg. 95.

even into the 1950s, and one of the nation's most popular anti-Catholic religious tracts of the century, *American Freedom and Catholic Power*, was published in Boston in 1949.[29]

By the early 1900s, the city's Protestant old guard had been swept away as a political force and Irish Catholics had come to dominate Boston. The "Irish machine", a concerted Irish ethnic voting bloc, led to the election of mayors such as the flamboyant John F. Fitzgerald in the 1910s. The election of the populist mayor of Boston James Michael Curley in the 1920s was a "watershed" for Boston's Irish population, marking the start of their firm grip on the reigns of the city's political future. This trend continued into the 21st century, and every mayor after Curley was a baptized Irish-American Catholic.[30] The importance of Catholics to the local electorate would grant the Archdiocesan leadership and parish priests huge influence over the political fortunes of the state in the years before the Second Vatican Council.

By the 1950s, while Irish-Americans continued to dominate the Archdiocese of Boston, they had also been joined by tens of thousands of new immigrants, mostly coming from Southern and Eastern Europe. The largest cohort arrived from Italy, but many also came from Poland, Lithuania, and Portugal.[31] A migration of French-Canadians into the area contributed to a growth in the French-speaking Catholic population as well. These different groups brought their own cultural elements and unique Catholic traditions with them when they arrived.[32] Before the Second Vatican Council, ethnic tensions among Catholics in the Archdiocese would sometimes boil over. While Irish and Italian-American pastors would often serve diverse

[29] Paul Blanshard, *American Freedom and Catholic Power* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949).
[30] Lawler, *Faithful Departed*, 30-31.
[31] O'Connor, *Boston Catholics,* 159.
[32] Thomas Day, *Why Catholics Can't Sing* (New York: Crossroads Classic, 1992), 2.

congregations together during this period, misunderstandings and outright discriminations between different groups of Catholics would continue into the 1960's, though trends in the post-Conciliar period would alleviate these issues as would the Americanization of most second-generation European-American immigrants.

Many parishes into the 1950s had a strong ethnic character, with carefully maintained segregation between different groups. One priest who would be ordained in the 1960's explained the practical impact of this policy on his own family. His Italian-born parents told him as a child how their desire to be married in a certain Irish-dominated church in Boston during the 1920's was rejected by the priest and parish there. Instead, they were sent down the street to the local Italian parish to have their wedding.[33] This world of ethnic Catholicism would be transformed by the onset of the Second Vatican Council. A new American Catholicism would be born during this period, in which ethnic traditions rooted in local European cultures were eliminated and replaced by the American Catholicism being shaped by the reforms of Vatican II.

## Cardinal Cushing and the Council

Few could have imagined such an enormous transformation resulting from the Council, and Cushing himself at first seemed to have little idea of the importance of the meeting which was assembled in Rome. He believed there were more important events happening in his own Archdiocese to warrant too long stay at the first session, and he spent only two weeks there before returning to Boston.[34] Few in the Eternal City at that time imagined the scope of change which would result from the event. "There were not  a lot of expectations of what would

[33] Fr. Albert Sallese, interview with the author, St. Barbara's Church (Woburn), Oct 2017.
[34] Cutler, *Cardinal Cushing*, 258.

happen at the Council," Fr. Sheehan, a Boston priest studying at the Pontifical North American College in Rome during the Council said of the mood among the clergy in the city.[35] How could there be? The Catholic Church as an institution had roots dating back almost 2,000 years to the days when the Christian faith was still new, a marginal religion in the Roman Empire. Since that time, tradition had been a guiding principle in the Church's life, and the handing on of teaching and practices without serious change or alteration was central to what it meant to be Catholic. While important ecumenical Councils had made changes in the Church's past, it was never at the scale of Vatican II and rarely affected the practice of Catholicism at the level of the laity. Rather, typically broad theological statements were made, such as the declaration of papal infallibility which had been made at the First Vatican Council in 1870.[36] While this proclamation changed the way the Catholic laity viewed their Pope, it did little to change their day to day experience of Catholicism. In contrast to this, Vatican II brought about many reforms which would affect the lived experience of Catholicism for all members of the Church.

In Boston uncertainty and indifference reigned toward the prospect of serious reform coming from the Council. Expectations of what Vatican II would produce were quite limited, among both clergy and their parishioners. This is captured in an article in the *Boston Globe* from December of 1961, which attempted to predict the developments that would result from the Council. The writer held that the agenda was, "likely to be filled with controversial items" and could lead to increase in both "religious tolerance and mixed marriages," and a reform to the "index of forbidden books" along with "decentralization of the Vatican authority, a married

[35] Fr. Dennis Sheehan interview.
[36] Chadwick, *History of the Popes*, 217.

diaconate, and modernization of the seminaries."[37] In many ways this list was quite accurate, and most of the items of reform the author touched upon would be enacted over the course of the Conciliar period. However, the list the author compiled also shows just how limited the expectations around Vatican II were at first. Compared to the true reforms which the Council would produce, these changes seem quite small. The author believed that, "Many agenda items will be put to the council in such a way that the 2,000 prelates attending will be able to vote affirmatively with little debate." This turned out not to be the case. Instead, open debate around all these subjects and more would not only be allowed, but encouraged.[38]

Immediately following Pope John XXIII's original declaration of his intent to host a Council, years of preparation had begun, led by Church officials in Rome. A team of theological conservatives from the Roman Curia, the Church's chief administrative unit, had carefully drafted documents on various topics they felt the Council needed to address. Each of these was written in a traditional manner with a firm, triumphalist, and authoritarian style. For example, on the topic of atheism in the modern world the original schema *On Christian Moral Order* declared that the Church:

> notes with great horror that errors are being spread everywhere, errors that open the way to perdition and close the gate of salvation. There are those who deny a personal God and so deprive the natural law of its foundation… Their impiety and impudence reach such a point that they attempt to assault heaven and to remove God himself from the midst.[39]

This was the antithesis of the style which Pope John XXIII and liberal European and North

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[37] Barret McGurn, "The Agenda at the Vatican Council," *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), December 28, 1961.
[38] Ibid.,
[39] "Draft of a Dogmatic Constitution on the Christian Moral Order," Blog of Joseph Komonchak (prominent Vatican II scholar), https://jakomonchak.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/on-the-christian-moral-order.pdf

American prelates hoped for the Council to project and due to their protests on November 20, 1962 during the first session a vote was held on whether the Fathers should restrict themselves just to discussion of the prepared schemas, or whether debate and new proposals would be allowed.[40]

A movement to reject these traditional schemas was led by liberal Western European prelates from France and Germany. The men were able to convince a majority of bishops that more debate and new documents were necessary to achieve the true purposes of the Second Vatican Council, a reconciliation between the Church and the modern world.[41] Their efforts led a simple majority to vote of Fathers to vote against the prepared documents. However, they could not assemble enough votes among the bishops to reach the two-thirds majority which the Council's ground rules required to ratify such a decision. At this point the future of the Council hung in the balance. If it were not for the intervention of Pope John XXIII the next day, there is little doubt that the traditional schema the Curial committee had assembled would have guided Vatican II upon a more rigid and conservative path. Instead, the Pope ordered that the rules be ignored, and declared that the schema could be rejected.[42] This intervention manifested the tone and pace of the Council's reforms throughout its following sessions, and in its implementation. Liberal reforms would not flow democratically upward from the laity and priests to the bishops, rather they emanated top-down from the Pope in Rome to his subordinate clergy and then to dioceses worldwide.

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[40] Francis Wiltgen, *The Rhine Flows into the Tiber* (Rockford, IL: Tan Publishers, 1967), 46-50.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

From that point forward, open debate would flourish at the Council, and the liberals would be successful in pushing forward their initiatives during the following sessions. In each of these sessions, new documents would be produced as the fruit of the discussions and debates held among the bishops. The documents promulgated by the Council Fathers were written in a far different style than the original schema. For example, in contrast to the condemnatory section on atheism in the schema *On Christian Moral Order,* the actual document published by the Council Fathers on the same subject stated that the Church instead, "courteously invites atheists to examine the Gospel of Christ with an open mind."[43]

During the first session of the Council one of its most important, and most hotly debated documents, would be approved and promulgated: *Sancrosanctum Concilium*.[44] This declaration called for a reform of the Roman Catholic Mass. The liturgy had been a central concern of a certain group of clergymen since the mid-19th century. This began with the birth of the Liturgical Movement in 19th century Europe. Started by the efforts of a French Benedictine monk during the 1830s to return Catholic worship to the forefront of the devotional life of the faithful, members of the movement believed that a reform to the Catholic Mass would lead to a renewal of the Church worldwide. In the early decades, they attempted to increase knowledge of the Mass and the meaning of its elements among the laity. However, by the 1950s the successors of this earlier trend in the Liturgical Movement had begun to believe that only a change in the substance of the rites themselves would be capable of making the Mass

[43] "Gaudium et Spes," *Vatican.va*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

[44] "Sancrosanctum Concilium," *Vatican.va,* http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-i_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html

intelligible and useful for modern man.[45] These members of the movement would be empowered during Vatican II by the Pope and prelates worldwide to enact their vision of reform on the Mass, transforming the lived experience of all Catholics. This especially affected the laity, whose primary experience of the Catholic faith occurred during weekly Sunday Mass.

Cardinal Cushing had shown sympathy for this movement earlier by hosting a Liturgical Day in Boston in 1948.[46] This event was organized by members of the Liturgical Movement, which by this point was dedicated to changing the Catholic Mass as part of a larger reform of the Church. During the Liturgy Day a Mass was held in the Archdiocese's Cathedral of the Holy Cross. It featured unique elements favored by members of the Liturgical Movement, and was meant to present their vision of a transformed rite. For example, the priests faced the gathered congregation, rather than facing the altar with their back to the crowd as had been the tradition for over a thousand years. The Mass at the 1948 Boston Liturgical Day pre-empted many of the reforms to the liturgy which would occur following the Second Vatican Council. In the Archdiocese of Boston, the Liturgical Movement was particularly strong.[47] While the general laity were not involved, among priests and seminarians there was interest in the movement's ideas during the pre-Conciliar period. In the global Catholic Church this movement remained on the fringe of Catholic life. Despite this fact, already Cushing was a friend of these hopeful liturgical reformers. This preference for change in the celebration of Catholic rites would help to transform the Church in Boston as a result of the Second Vatican Council.

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[45] Alcuin Reid, "The Twentieth Century Liturgical Movement," *T&T Clark Companion to Liturgy* (New York: T&T Clark, 2015.), 165-170.

[46] "Liturgical Week Mass." *Boston Pilot* (Boston, MA), August 7, 1948.

[47] Fr. John O'Donnell, Interview with the author, Regina Cleri Priest's Home (Boston), October 2017.

Cushing's major focus at the Council was not the liturgy though. His sole speaking intervention would be on a different topic, one closer to his heart. On September 23, 1964 Cushing arose in the chamber hall in which the debates and discussions of Vatican II were held.[48] At this third of the Council session of the Council the subject had changed from the liturgy to focus on two interrelated subjects, the Church's teaching on religious liberty and teaching on the relationship between Catholicism and other faiths. The Church had traditionally condemned religious liberty, or the right of individuals to choose their faith free from the coercion of the state.[49] Like many other American bishops, Cushing was uncomfortable with this teaching, which so clearly contrasted with the ruling paradigm in his homeland. The Cardinal was a proponent of the new theological ideas being propagated by an American Jesuit, John Courtenay Murray, which proposed a change in Catholic teaching which would allow for a new right to be proclaimed by the Church, a right to religious freedom.[50]

Intertwined with this issue was the Church's claim to being the one path to salvation. This belief left ecumenical relationships with members of other Christian denominations, and people of other faiths, difficult. Cushing, coming from the pluralist society of the United States, hoped the Vatican Council would find a way to allow for positive relationships to be built among Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. The memory of the Holocaust only two decades earlier made addressing the Church's view of the Jewish people especially urgent to many bishops at the Council.[51] Catholic relations with Jews in America were often cold in Boston during

[48] O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II,* 217.
[49] Ibid., 212
[50] Cutler, *Cardinal Cushing,* 276.
[51] O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II,* 219.

Cushing's tenure, due to traditional Catholic beliefs about the culpability of the Jewish people for the crucifixion of Christ. While interactions between Jews and Catholics were limited during the early 20th century, negative sentiments between the two groups were common, and Boston Catholics might casually refer to Jews as "Christ-Killers." Cushing's own opinions on the matter were quite progressive, and even before the Second Vatican Council's moves to ameliorate relations between Jews and Catholics he was known as a friend of the Jewish community in the Archdiocese of Boston. His sister even took a rare step during that era and married a Jewish man, while retaining her Catholic faith.[52]

For Cushing and a majority of the American bishops present, even the notably traditional Cardinal Spellman of New York City, having the American view of a separation between Church-State and a right to religious freedom accepted by the Council was an important goal.[53] It was to further this goal that Cardinal Cushing made his case during the third session. In a speech which would later be published by the *New York Times*, Cushing quoted the American Declaration of Independence while arguing that a Church document enshrining a right to religious freedom was a "necessary safeguard" for the "decent respect for the opinion of mankind."[54] On this subject Cushing was once more aligned with the progressive wing of the Council. *Dignitatis Humanae,* the text promulgated by the Council Fathers on religious liberty, was seen as a compromise document. It began by stating that the Council Fathers were leaving, "untouched traditional Catholic doctrine on the moral duty of men and societies toward the

[52] Lawler, *Faithful Departed*, 47.
[53] "Cardinal Speaks Out for Liberty," *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), September 15, 1965.
[54] Robert C. Doty, "US Bishops Back Religious Liberty in Council Clash," *New York Times* (New York, NY), September 24, 1964.

true religion and toward the one Church of Christ."[55] Following this apparent declaration of traditional Catholic teaching, the document proceeded to build a new case for the right to religious freedom and argued against the duty of the state to coerce its subjects in matters of religion. For an American, living in a pluralist society with a constitutionally defined right to freedom of religion, this might have seemed a normal and good opinion to maintain. But, to the Catholic Church only a few short years before such views would have been anathema and it was this document more than any other which led to theological dissent following the Council.[56]

## The Cardinal Implements His Reform

Even before this intervention in 1964, Cushing had begun to implement his own vision of the Vatican Council's message upon his return to the Archdiocese of Boston following the first session of the Council in December of 1963. Here, his own individual beliefs were paramount in shaping the way Vatican Two would be portrayed by the hierarchy of the Archdiocese of Boston. Cushing had already shown himself an ally of the academic priests who were involved in the the liberal, reforming Liturgical Movement. Following the Council, Cushing tasked an Archdiocesan organization, the Sacramental Apostalate, with implementing the reforms to the liturgy which had been called for by the Council Fathers. This group was composed of liberal members of the Liturgical Movement. In this endeavor the Sacramental Apostalate was supposed to be guided by the principles enunciated in the decree

[55] "Dignitatis Humanae," *Vatican.va* http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html

[56] For example, the schismatic Society of St. Pius X broke with Rome over the meaning of this document.

*Sancrosanctum Concilium.*[57] It is important to note that this document had called for reforms in a broad sense, and had not actually detailed what concrete changes should be made to the Mass.

In Rome, the Pope had assembled his own group of liturgical experts to piece together a reformed rite. They would release this service in 1964, but this new Mass still contained most elements of the traditional Latin Mass. However, its implementation on the ground in the Archdiocese of Boston, under the guidance of the Sacramental Apostolate, was reformed not so much in its rubrics as in its aesthetic and essence. The spirit in which liturgical reforms in Boston would be made by Cardinal Cushing and the Sacramental Apostolate would be one which embraced the necessity and benefits of radical and rapid change to the Mass. The idea that Vatican II had opened up new doors for the future of the liturgy would be materialized most concretely by Cardinal Cushing himself. A close friend of the Kennedy family, following JFK's assassination a memorial Mass was held in Boston's Holy Cross Cathedral. To the surprise of American Catholics who attended the packed event or listened along on the radio, the musical setting to this Mass was Mozart's *Requiem*. For decades considered an operatic concert piece and banned from performance during the liturgy, Cushing had taken a daring step in selecting it for this occasion.[58] From that point forward, earlier restrictions on the type of music performed at Mass would quickly be forgotten. The long standing tradition of the Church was to perform liturgical music accompnied only by an organ and sung in Latin. Following Cushing's Mass these songs would be replaced with folksy tunes instead of the sounds of Mozart in most

[57] "Sancrosanctum Concilium," *Vatican.va*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-i_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html
[58] Day, *Why Catholics Can't Sing*, 30.

parishes. In his action Cushing had opened the door, and this new style of Mass would be promoted by his Sacramental Apostolate, who went so far as to promote a "Folk Music Mass" in the Archdiocese.[59]

It was not just in the area of the liturgy that Cardinal Cushing would be the guiding force of reform. He also sought a rapid rapprochement with local Protestants and Jews which he saw as called for by the Council Fathers' document on ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio* and the proclamation on non-Christian faiths, *Nostrate Aetete*.[6061]Immediately upon his return to Boston from Rome he published an official communication, sent to every priest in the diocese, explaining what he saw as the key takeaways from the Council. The Cardinal wrote that at Vatican II the Council Fathers had been:

> caught up in the worldwide concern for the welfare of the Church and the cause of Christian unity. Ancient prejudices were re-examined, a refreshing exchange of dialogue began and mutual barriers of bigotry and misunderstanding toppled…the change in attitudes between Catholics and other Christians is the first flowering of sincere brotherhood.[62]

Before the Council, Cushing was a fierce opponent of Harvard, dismayed by the school's negative attitude toward Catholicism. He also saw it as competition for the Catholic universities of Holy Cross and Boston College. However, during the Council he had become a friend of the

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[59] "Notes of the Sacramental Apostolate," November 2, 1966, Liturgical Movement Collection, Archive of the Archdiocese of Boston.

[60] "Unitatis redintegratio" *Vatican.va*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html

[61] "Nostrate aetate," *Vatican.va*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html

[62] "Letter sent to all Priests of the Archdiocese by Cardinal Cushing," 1964, Vatican II Collection, Archive of the Archdiocese of Boston.

Dean of Harvard Divinity School, Douglas Horton, who had been invited to observe at Vatican II as a representative of the Protestant churches. Their relationship would remain close after both returned to Boston. This culminated in Cushing's writing of a warm introduction to a book by Horton entitled "*Toward an Undivided Church*", which suggested ways in which Catholics and Protestants could unite into one church body in the immediate future.[63] In relation to non-Christians, Cushing would build strong relationships with Boston's rabbis and Jewish community.[64] In his speeches and talks from the time of the Council onward Cushing would be adamant in proclaiming his belief that Catholics, Protestants and Jews must dialogue together and accept one another.

## The Revolution in the Church

This new spirit of openness would soon lead to trouble for Cushing in the Archdiocese. It was not the changes which he was enacting per se, but rather the jarring pace at which they occurred. What had once been indisputable dogma, the position of the Catholic Church as the only means of salvation for all mankind, was subtly called into question by Cushing's openness to Protestants and Jews. If the Latin Mass, which most lay Catholics considered to be an accurate representation of a service which Jesus and his Apostles had performed during Christ's lifetime, could be changed in a matter of years by decree from Rome, what aspects of the faith couldn't or wouldn't be called into question? In the Conciliar period almost every aspect of Catholic life and practice would be examined and many would be reformed from on high.

[63] Douglas Horton, *Toward an Undivided Church* (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1968).
[64] Cutler, *Cardinal Cushing*, 279.

Cushing's life is filled with contradictions which he could not have thought through to their final ends. He had made a name for himself in fundraising for the foreign missions, dedicated to spreading the Catholic faith overseas. And yet, in his public statements he called for greater dialogue and friendship between Protestants and Jews, making no effort to convert his friends of either faith to Catholicism. When Jackie Kennedy sought to marry the divorced Aristotle Onassis later in the 1960's, despite the Church's condemnation of the union as invalid and sinful, Cushing sympathized with her and faced Rome's fury for asking why she "could not just be left alone" to make her decision.[65] Cushing remained a staunch anti-communist, and decried the situation of the Catholic Church in Latin America as a disaster due to the growing influence of communism there, especially among the clergy. He would also remain a supporter of the Vietnam War and held that communism was "the greatest evil" of the time.[66] Cushing wanted the Church to embrace what he saw as the best aspects of both American society and modernity, such as pluralism and religious freedom, while retaining a core of Catholic faith. His support for increased ties with other religions, reform to the liturgy, and the right to religious liberty would make the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Boston more closely aligned with the broader culture of the United States. However, it would also undercut the unique elements of Catholicism, such as the Latin Mass, which were integral to the identity of the Catholic community and which tied many of the faithful to the Church most closely.

Nearing the end of his life, Cushing would end his reign dismayed by the course which the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council had taken in the Archdiocese of Boston. The

[65] Edward Fisk, "The Church and Jacqueline Onassis." *New York Times* (New York, NY), October 27, 1968.
[66] "Conquer Evil by Sacrifices." *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), March 24, 1967.

reform had left many disoriented, and others pushing the limits of the Catholic Church in the ways which even the liberal reformer Cushing could not condone. In the spring of 1968, he took multiple opportunities to criticize the results of the Council, in terms of the dissent it had unleashed. In May at a dinner in Nantasket hosted by the South Shore Catholic Charities Guild, Cushing lashed out against "Catholic dissidents." He complained that, "some priests, nuns and lay people have no fear of God or man" and instead, "obey what they say their consciences tell them is only good for themselves." He concluded that, "some of them should not have become priests or nuns in the first place. They did not have vocations."[67] In June he was invited to serve as commencement speaker at his alma mater Boston College High School. He used this opportunity to express his anger over the liberal dissent which had erupted in the Church following the Council, and manifested itself in actions such as the St. John's Revolt of '66. In criticism of radically liberal reformers within the Church calling for even greater change, Cushing said that:

> Good Pope John would be whirling in his coffin if he reacted whenever his name is taken in vain today…hardly a week passes that some atheist dialoguing on television with some theologian does not maneuver himself into the fold of the mantle of Pope John.[68]

Furthermore, he defended his own record by saying that, "some Catholic practices are changing…but Catholic faith does not change."[69] He maintained firmly that, "the Church isn't in revolution."[70]

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[67] "Cardinal Denounces Catholic Dissidents." *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), May 23, 1968.
[68] Church isn't in Revolution an annoyed Cardinal insists" *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), June 2, 1968.
[69] "Cardinal Denounces Catholic Dissidents." *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), May 23, 1968.
[70] "Church isn't in Revolution an annoyed Cardinal insists" *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), June 2, 1968.

# Chapter 2: The New Priesthood

**Thou art a priest in the line of Melchizedek, God says of him, for ever**
**-Hebrews 7:17**

## A Catholic Culture

For the O'Donnell family during the 1930s and 1940s, life in Salem revolved around their parish church of Immaculate Conception, the oldest in the Archdiocese of Boston. On Sundays, everyone would attend Mass together. Mr. O'Donnell, the head of the family, was a Sunday sexton, in charge of opening up the church building early in the morning before services began. He was also a leading member of the St. Vincent DePaul Society, a Catholic charitable organization. He belonged to Father Matthew's Temperance Society, dedicated to eradicating the vice of drunkenness from the local Irish-Catholic community. He was active in the Knights of Columbus, a Catholic male fraternal organization similar to the Freemasons. His wife, Mrs. O'Donnell, was an active member of the Immaculate Conception community and participated in the parish's women's guild. This group decorated the altar according to the season and baked for parish events. Through the guild she helped to organize rosary nights and other prayer meetings at the church. The society in which their many sons and daughters grew up was one in which the Catholic religion was pervasive. Across the Archdiocese of Boston, family and cultural life among Catholics was dominated by the presence of the church. [71]

Many of the priests and religious of the Vatican II generation share similar stories of their path to the consecrated life. Most came from large and pious families who were active

[71] Fr. John O'Donnell interview.

members in their local parish.[72] The culture which produced these priests was one in which Catholicism was a defining feature of family life and identity. Their faith tied them not just to their local neighborhood, centered around the parish church, but also to deeper ethnic identities. To be Irish or Italian was also to be Catholic. In the Boston of the 1930s through the 1950s, a vibrant religious culture with common practices and symbols dominated areas where Irish, Italians, Poles, French and other historically Catholic ethnic groups resided in numbers.[73] The Catholic parishes of the Archdiocese shared a common calendar which guided the year of the entire community, with Church events the focal point of each season. Throughout the neighborhoods of the Archdiocese, local children would march annually in the Spring May Parade in honor of the Virgin Mary.[74] Together the entire community would fast on Good Friday, and remain silent from 12:00 to 3:00 p.m. on that day to recognize the time Christ was believed to have hung on the cross. At Immaculate Conception the pastor would open up the gym for the neighborhood's boys to practice their shots and prepare for basketball games organized by the Catholic Youth Organization, a major youth sports association in the Archdiocese.[75]

Many children attended their local Catholic school for free, a situation that was economically feasible for such institutions due to their reliance on teachers who were either priests or nuns from religious orders sworn to vows of poverty. This exposure to the religious

[72] Almost all of the priests and nuns from the Archdiocese I spoke to came from families with four or more children.
[73] "Parish Records for the Vatican II Collection", 1962, Vatican II Collection, Archive of the Archdiocese of Boston. The list of ethnicities found in the Archdiocese is based on this resource which included a listing of the ethnic parishes in the Archdiocese.
[74] Thomas O'Connor, *Boston Catholics,* 209.
[75] Fr. John O'Donnell interview

life on such a daily basis was the source of many vocations. Ed Carroll, born into a devout Irish-Catholic family in Lowell, attended elementary school at St. Peter Marian before going to Keith Academy, which was run by the Xaverian Brothers. He was attracted to the priesthood by the brothers who served as teachers in the classrooms there. It was seeing their service in the classroom which inspired his own decision to enter the seminary following graduation.[76] In a similar manner, nuns were often convinced to join the congregations of teachers who served at the schools which they attended as girls.

It is perhaps because they came from such thick Catholic communities that these priests and religious would be the very same that pushed the hardest to bring the cultural Catholicism of the pre-Vatican II era to an end while they brought to life their own vision of a revived and reformed Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Boston. Having grown up in a world in which priests and nuns were respected leaders of the community, viewed as the guardians of morality and proper Christian conduct within their parishes or classrooms, it would be hard to imagine a scenario in which the moral authority of these figures could be subverted. The young men and women who became priests and nuns in the Archdiocese during the 1950s and 1960s joined a Church which was not on the cusp of change. They had very little reason to believe any change to be in the offing. And yet, the future of this institution was being shaped across the sea in Rome. Pope John XXIII's calling of the Vatican Council would be the turning point in the trajectories of the lives of many priests and nuns throughout the Archdiocese of Boston.

These men and women had enthusiastically joined an institution bound to the idea of tradition, the handing on of what had been passed down to them before. And yet, these very

[76] Fr. Ed Carroll interview.

same men and women would become caught up in the "spirit of Vatican II", a spirit which would lead them to boldly experiment with new ways of being priests and nuns, new ways of worshiping as Catholics, and new ways of interacting with the world outside of the Church. Each of these new ways was in contrast to those practiced by the pre-Vatican II Church, but they did not arise from a vacuum. Rather priests and nuns looked to the example of the American society around them and the modern movements forming during the 1960s as a source of inspiration for their own revolutionary movements in the Church. The pace of change and the level of experimentation which occurred were the antithesis of the common practice of the Church for decades and even centuries, and would be disorienting for older priests, but these younger priests would, through their actions, give birth to a new, American Catholicism in the Archdiocese of Boston.

## The Seminary

The priests of the Archdiocese of Boston were all trained at St. John's Seminary in Brighton, and it was often in opposition to the rigors which life there entailed that priests would embrace the new liberality which they saw as a key element of the Second Vatican Council's reforms. One former seminarian explained that, due to the shock of life at St. John's, within two days he was ready to leave.[77] During this time, most candidates for the priesthood would begin their training immediately after high school. They would first attend Cardinal O'Connell Minor Seminary for two years before moving on to St. John's. At both institutions life was heavily regimented, and each school maintained a semi-monastic environment for the priests in training who entered their doors. All seminarians had to wear the cassock (a long, buttoned

[77] Fr. Ed Carroll interview.

black robe) all the time. The schedule was strict and life was run by the bells which rang throughout the campus, dictating the day of the seminarians. [78]

The curriculum for those entering in the 1950s and 1960s relied heavily upon the memorization of theological manuals. Classes were taught in English and were based on the "rote memorization of moral manuals and liturgical rubrics," a manner which dated back to the Counter-Reformation period of the 16 and 17th centuries.[79] The seminary had produced many members of the Liturgical Movement, which was dedicated to the rejuvenation of Catholic worship and reform in the Church more generally.[80] Members of the movement were confident that the transformation of society could occur through the preparation of individuals through the rituals of the Church. Members of the movement also criticized the devotional activities, which dominated Catholic life during this period, such as the Rosary, as superstitious excesses which took away from the true heart of Christian life, the celebration of the Mass.[81] Despite the fact that this faction was active at St. John's seminary, the ethos of the school remained broadly traditional, and it was only the calling of Vatican II which would enable change to seize upon the faculty and student body and transform the seminary from one firmly rooted in the model of the Counter-Reformation, to one dominated by the spirit of Vatican II.

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[78] Ibid.

[79] John Seitz, "What better place? Refiguring Priesthood at St. John's Seminary," *U.S. Catholic Historian,* Volume 33, Number 2, Spring 2015, 56.

[80] The leading American member of the movement, Fr. Frederick McManus, was both an alumnus and a professor there.

[81] Reid, *T&T Clark Companion to Liturgy,* 155-56.

Pope John's Council would inspire a majority of the generation of Vatican II priests, filling them with hopes that they could transform the priesthood into something quite different than the one they had grown up with, so that the role of priest would remain relevant in the modern world. Even just the idea of a Council, and the belief that any reform, whether great or small, could emerge from the event began to seize upon the imaginations of the seminarians at St. John's following the first sessions of the event. At breakfast each morning young deacons, students who had been ordained to Holy Orders but were still some years away from becoming full priests, were allowed to preach practice sermons to the rest of the student body. From 1963 onwards the dominant theme of these talks was the Council being held in Rome.[82] Within the seminary, despite the misgivings of some conservative members of the faculty, the meaning of the Council would be presented to the students within the spirit of Vatican II. The narrative presented was one of rupture with a disappointing past, a Counter-Reformation Church which had closed out the modern world and was in need of reform.

As the Council progressed, a series of speakers was scheduled to give regular lectures to the student body on the event. The liberal theologian, Fr. Charlie Von Hugh, who had served as Cardinal Cushing's *peritus* (theological adviser) at the Council in Rome, was a regular at St. John's. He was accompanied in giving lectures at the school by a former faculty member, Fr. Frederick McManus, a prominent figure in the Liturgical Movement and a guiding force on the committee Pope Paul VI, the successor to Pope John XXIII following his death after the Council's first session, had tasked with the creation of the new Mass. These speakers presented Vatican II as a revolutionary moment in the Church. The changing spirit of the time would also be

[82] Fr. Ed Carroll interview.

reflected in the invitation of one Mr. Slater, a Protestant minister, to come and teach a four-week lecture series on the Vatican Council.[83] This last figure would have been surprising to students. Records from this time show that Protestants were still referred to as schismatics or members of sects within official Archdiocesan communications regarding matters such as mixed marriages between Catholics and other Christians.[84] The fact that Protestants were now invited into the heart of the Church, the formation ground of the future clergy, is emblematic of the changes occurring in the hierarchy's outlook, and also of the vast changes which priests could expect to see within their lifetimes.

## The Priests and the New Movements

It was these men who presented Vatican II in such a way as to excite enthusiasm for liberal reforms among most seminarians and many priests. Their influence, and that of the liberal spirit of the Council which they preached, inspired many young priests in Boston to aspire to reforms within the Church which they had not imagined possible growing up in their local parishes, or even when they entered the religious life. An example of this is the transformation of priests' views on the Catholic liturgy, the Mass. Almost every priest in the Archdiocese had served as an altar boy during his childhood.[85] Each was intimately familiar with the Latin Mass. While some voices within the Archdiocese had called for reforms to this rite even before the Council was begun, and had even been supported to some extent by Cardinal Cushing, these were fringe figures in the overall Catholic establishment and their ideas had little

[83] Fr. John O'Donnell interview.

[84] "Note on Mixed-Marriage at St. Edward's, Brockton,"1960, Chancellor's Records, Archive of the Archdiocese of Boston.

[85] Only one of the priest's I interviewed had not been an altar boy, and he made clear that this was an unusual situation for a future priest.

influence among typical parish priests. However, with the onset of Vatican II, their opinions on the necessity to reform the Mass were now in vogue. St. John's Seminary, influenced by Fr. McManus and his intellectual associates who were coming to the fore as leaders within the American Church and experts on the liturgy, began sending students to Liturgical Weeks being held across the country. These were events in which seminarians and priests could come and discuss the importance of the Mass and the types of reform which might now be possible to its structure due to the Council's promulgation of *Sancrosanctum Concilium*, the Decree on the Sacred Liturgy.[86] Fr. O'Donnell was one of the priests selected to attend the Liturgical Week in Philadelphia in 1963 during the early days of Vatican II. It was an enthusiastic affair, with new and experimental liturgies being held to test the limits of reform opened up by the Vatican Council's liturgical decree.

Before attending the Philadelphia Liturgical Week, Fr. O'Donnell could not have imagined liturgy in the vernacular.[87] And yet, the Archdiocese's own Fr. Frederick McManus, in a speech given at the event proposed to the gathered crowd that, "Just as we will soon be proclaiming scriptures in the vernacular, we will soon be proclaiming the Eucharistic Prayer in the vernacular." Hearing this, Fr. O'Donnell was skeptical, though he began to think that such a change would be good to see in his own lifetime. By 1963 a slightly reformed Mass had been created in Rome which allowed scriptural passages to be read in English. The Eucharistic Prayer was the central element of the rite, and O'Donnell found it hard to imagine a change to this part of the Latin Mass. Inspired by the message of the Liturgical Week and now cognizant of

[86] "Sancrosanctum Concilium," *Vatican.va*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-i_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html
[87] Fr. John O'Donnell interview.

what he perceived as a need for a reform to the Mass, he decided to stay an extra day in the city and attend a "dry Mass" being held at a local church. This celebration was not a valid Mass as no bread and wine would be consecrated by the priest, meaning it would not actually be transubstantiated into Christ's body and blood as Catholics believe occurs at Mass. The event incorporated the changes which the members of the Liturgical Movement hoped would result from the opening granted by the Vatican Council and *Sancrosanctum Concilium*.[88] The altar was positioned to face the people and a liturgical expert stood nearby, stopping the action sometimes to explain the new elements and rituals which this form of Mass required of the priest. The service was held in English.

Fr. O'Donnell went with a friend of his, who whispered to him during the ceremony, "When are the police going to come in and arrest us?"[89] Priests and seminarians could hardly imagine the extent of the reforms which would result from Vatican II. This event also shows how the interpretation of the Council provided by liberal figures such as Fr. Frederick McManus could not only shape the perception priests had of the Council, but also inspire them to further action. Motivated by the accounts of change sweeping across Rome which Fr. McManus and similar figures were bringing back to the Archdiocese of Boston, and with the support of Cardinal Cushing himself, the seminarians in training at St. John and recent graduates of the institution began embracing what they saw as the purpose of the Council: to engage the modern world and open up the Church to a period of transformation and renewal**.**

[88] "Sancrosanctum Concilium," *Vatican.va*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-i_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html

[89] Fr. John O'Donnell interview.

Liberal priests, enthusiastic over the the revolution they believed Vatican II represented, would be the dominant cohort of their generation. Caught up in the enthusiasm not only of the Council, but also of the 1960s, the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Boston saw its priests wrapped up in a series of movements. While many of these pre-empted the broader social movements of the 1960s, such as the anti-War movement or the counter-culture movement, they were motivated by a similar drive to overturn the existing order and were revolutionary within the Catholic Church itself.

## New Political Movements

Some priests would take on radically new roles within their communities. They felt called to embrace a political role. Speaking a language combining American concepts of "citizen's rights" while also hearkening back to their priestly role as servants of their parish communities, these men entered the fray of local politics. "When Priests Become Men of the People," an article in the *Boston Globe* from 1974, describes the consequences of this in East Boston. There, six young priests had become involved in various political organizations or served as representatives in local government. They were inspired to take up this action by the their belief that, "Vatican II said we must serve the people."[90] One of these priests, Fr. Albert Sallese, was the son of Italian-Americans in Watertown and had been assigned to Most Holy Redeemer Parish in East Boston after his ordination in May of 1966. He had been enthusiastic about the Council in seminary, believing that there was "going to be a New Church" following the event.[91] He now saw that he had a broader mission in his role as priest than just performing

[90] Nancy Pomerene, "When Priests Become Men of the People." *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), August 12, 1974.
[91] Fr. Albert Sallese interview.

the Mass and providing sacraments to his parishioners. He interpreted the call of the Council to be: "go out to the world." He did not think priests could any longer be just content serving Mass and giving spiritual guidance. He explained that, "a priestly ministry does not end at the altar rail." Rather, he and other priests like him felt they had an expanded mission to touch on the lives of their local communities as well, to "be concerned with justice, and the environment, and social conditions."[92]

Following this calling Sallese threw himself into political activism and became involved in poverty programs in the neighborhoods of East Boston. He would soon be appointed a member of the Board of Directors of the Boston ABCD poverty program. A community crisis would lead Fr. Sallese deeper into the fray later in the 1970's. Logan Airport, located in East Boston, was a nuisance to the local community due to its loud noise and traffic. With the support of a part of his parish and the surrounding community, a petition to the governor was successfully put forward for Fr. Sallese to serve as a representative to the MassPort Board who oversaw the airport.[93] While this might seem like a rather mundane example of priestly political involvement, this was breaking new ground, as priests had not held any type of elected office and generally did not serve in local politics before Vatican II. It was also only possible to take on this role due to the spirit of the Council which now reigned, and had opened up space to push new boundaries in the Church. Other priests would take this call to service even further and enter into even higher public office.

[92] Nancy Pomerene, "When Priests become Men of the People." *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), August 12, 1974.
[93] Fr. Albert Sallese interview.

Jesuit Fr. Robert Drinan would be elected as Congressional Representative from Massachusetts in 1971. Despite pressure from the head of his order and Cardinal Cushing he would remain in this seat until 1981. During his time in office Fr. Drinan was a progressive democrat often at odds with the teachings of the Catholic Church due to his support for abortion and gay rights.[94] The opening of new political roles to priests often resulted in discomfort and backlash from local community members. East Boston residents were torn over the issue of priests' involvement in their local politics. Some East Boston Catholics felt it "desirable for a priest to use his leadership position to help the community with problems of poverty, pollution, and unemployment." In contrast to this, other Catholics viewed the "priest as a spiritual figurehead, whose ministry and personal habits should be above and apart from community concerns." In East Boston, these tensions would be resolved by the departure of the six political priests from the city. Some of these men chose to move on to new parishes, but many were forced out due to discomfort among the laity they served over their new roles. [95]

## The Ecumenical Movement

Ecumenical ties to other Christian denominations and faith groups were another result of Vatican II which the younger priests of Boston would seize upon. Many of them saw building relationships with people from different religious backgrounds as another way in which Vatican II could transform the Archdiocese of Boston. These impulses were driven by the clergy. It began at the top with Cardinal Cushing, who increasingly encouraged ecumenical activities following the Council. Two documents promulgated by the Council Fathers motivated these

[94] Lawler, *The Faithful Departed,* 61-63.

[95] Nancy Pomerene, "When Priests become Men of the People." *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), August 12, 1974.

endeavors. *Unitatis redintegratio* called for the eventual reunification of all Christian churches and promoted building relationships with Protestants and Orthodox Christians. The declaration *Nostrate aetate* rejected the traditional Catholic teaching that the Jewish people were personally responsible for the death of Christ. It expressed a desire for warmer relations with the Jewish people and suggested similarities between Catholicism and other major world religions such as Islam. These documents would inspire the Vatican II generation of priests in the Archdiocese and led to a variety of endeavors aiming at closer ties with people of other faiths.

While attending St. John's Seminary, Fr. Ed Carroll would take up the call he saw heralded by these documents and by the actions of his Cardinal. He and a group of five seminarians began sneaking over to Harvard Divinity School and meeting with Protestant theology students there. The group would engage in discussion and often get drinks and meals together.[96] These types of grass-roots relationships went a long way in breaking down the centuries of hostility and negative relations between Catholics and Protestants which had dominated the American Catholic experience. Fr. John O'Connell had grown up in a 1930s Salem still deeply divided along ethno-religious lines, with a Protestant Yankee upper-class often looking upon their Irish Catholic neighbors with disdain. There was little mixing between the two groups. However, in his first assignment in the suburbs south of Boston, inspired by the ecumenical ideals emanating from Rome, Fr. O'Donnell would become caught up in the

[96] Fr. Ed Carroll Interview.

movement himself and began meeting and organizing events with neighboring Protestants and Jews.[97]

While the ambitious goals of the ecumenical movement did not result in the reunification of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, excitement over the idea of Christian unity was widespread among the younger clergy. Many of the achievements of this ecumenical impulse were fleeting. For example, a meeting of Anglican and Catholic clergy in Boston during the mid-1970's "aimed at future unity between the two communions" was touted as an "ecumenical breakthrough" in the *Boston Globe*. Even Cushing's more conservative successor as Archbishop Humberto Cardinal Medeiros, would tell a reporter that if true and full unity was not the conference's goal then the attendants were "wasting their time."[98] Even if these and other such efforts with Protestant denominations did not result in institutional unity, the views of the clergy towards their neighbors of varying faiths were changing. Relationships and friendships across the lines of faith which had been unthinkable before Vatican II, between Catholic priests and Protestant ministers, or even Jewish rabbis, would become possible in this new era of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. In this way, the clergy would take an ideal they had absorbed from their own nation, the pluralism which was valued in the United States, and bring the Catholic Church's stance into line with this ideal.

## The Generational Divide

Not every member of the clergy wanted to be a part of this new Church. The liberalizing reforms of Vatican II would spread to the parishes of the Archdiocese mainly through the

[97] Fr. John O'Donnell interview.

[98] Kay Longcope, "Ecumenical Breakthrough is Achieved," *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA). Jun. 6, 1975.

influence of young priests. The contemporary system of priest placement in the Archdiocese mandated that the newly ordained would first serve as assistant pastors under older priests following their ordination. Due to this model, in churches across the Archdiocese the fault lines of priests' conflicting views of the Council and its implementation would be played out. For the most part, older priests were confused by the changes which the Council was calling for, most especially the changes to the liturgy. A young priest during the 1960s remembered that the senior pastor of his church, Fr. Frank Costello, could not cope with the scope and speed of the reforms to the Mass. A veteran priest, by the 1960s he had "lost his place" being unable to keep up with the pace of reform.[99] Fr. Sheehan, in his first assignment as assistant pastor in East Boston, recalled the response of his head pastor, an Irish-American priest who was 75 years old when the Council was drawing to a close. Seeing the rapid pace of change in the institution he had dedicated his life to he was "absolutely convinced that Vatican II was a disaster."[100] He harshly referred to Pope John XXIII as the "peasant of Bergamo" due to his background in rural Italy, and was a sharp critic of the change in the language of the Mass from Latin to English. Yet despite such complaints, open resistance was nearly unheard of.

Most older priests focused their critiques on the new Mass. The loss of the reverent and solemn Latin Mass and its rapid replacement with a newly formatted liturgy in the vernacular was a shocking event for many. Their discomfort with the new situation led Cardinal Medeiros, the successor to Cushing in the early 1970s, to issue an allowance for older priests to celebrate the Latin Mass privately following the ban of its public celebration within the Archdiocese in

[99] Fr. Ed Carroll interview.
[100] Fr. Dennis Sheehan interview.

1971.[101] Many took advantage of this, and perhaps the continued saying of this form of the Mass by older priests can be viewed as a small act of defiance. One large act of defiance was that of Fr. John Keane. Of the 2,500 priests in the Archdiocese of Boston he was the only one who refused to stop saying the Latin Mass. He continued saying this form of the rite despite the Cardinal's official ban on its public celebration. Eventually, this contest of wills would lead to the suspension of Fr. Keane, but not before he had purchased his own church building and started a number of illicit Catholic parishes across the Archdiocese. Fr. Keane, speaking with the *Boston Globe* in 1974, asked of the Old Mass: "if it was good and right for centuries, why is it wrong now?"[102] While his parishes only ever had a few hundred members, the Archdiocese's reaction to Fr. Keane's defiance is exemplary of the official attitude towards Pre-Vatican II practices and rituals taken by the hierarchy. Fr. Keane was not fully suspended for refusing to submit to the Cardinal's requests that he cease saying the Old Mass until 1980. By this time his operation had grown to encompass three parishes in the Boston area.[103] This was the largest, and only, traditionalist reaction to the reforms of Vatican II in the Archdiocese.

The message sent by this suspension was that the changes of Vatican II were not a passing fad in the Church, rather they were here to stay. Despite grumblings, most older priests accepted this fact as the new reality. For this reason, many deferred to the younger priests who came out of the seminaries flush with confidence in their understanding of the true meaning of the Council to serve as their guides through the immediate post-Conciliar period. Reversing the traditional situation, in which older priests would mentor their younger assistants, many newly

[101] "Priest Refuses to Stop Celebrating Mass in Latin" *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), Jan. 11, 1974.
[102] Kay Longcope, "Priest Saying Latin Mass, Fears Suspension" *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), Jan. 10, 1974.
[103] Francis J. Scott, "Father Keane Suspended." *The Angelus*, (Los Angeles, CA), August, 1980.

ordained religious now had to lead their head pastors through the tumultuous revisions to the liturgy and the new declarations coming from Rome and the Archdiocesan Chancellery in Boston.[104]

## The Nuns of the Archdiocese

An even starker conflict would be faced by nuns and women religious in the Archdiocese. At the beginning of the 1960s there were some 6,000 nuns serving mainly in schools and hospitals in the Boston area. While parishioners would have weekly interactions with their parish priests every Sunday, daily a majority of students at Archdiocesan Catholic schools were taught in the classroom by nuns. Communities of women religious had been founded in the Archdiocese during the early 18th century. In the 1960s, the day to day life of members in these orders had changed very little. It was geared towards stability, and the women who entered the convent generally expected to live according to the traditions which had been passed down to them across generations.[105] This ideal would be upended in 1962 with the advent of the Second Vatican Council. A reforming spirit would become present within the female religious communities of the Archdiocese of Boston which led to changes in lived religious practice among nuns which were greater than those experienced by either the priests or laity of the region.

Serving as a priest in the Archdiocese of Boston prior to the Second Vatican Council was a prestigious position which established one as a community leader. Aside from the vow of celibacy and the dedication one gave of his entire life to the Church's direction, the day to day

[104] Fr. O'Donnell interview.

[105] Sister Catherine Decker, interview with the author, St. Joseph's Convent (Medford), November 2017.

experience could be as comfortable or austere as a priest desired. Many lived in large rectory houses next to their parish church. While the Council opened up new ways of thinking and participating in priestly ministry, in the post-Conciliar period the priest still remained saying a Mass each Sunday and administering sacraments, which though greatly reformed maintained the basic outline of their Pre-Vatican II counterparts. In contrast, the nuns of the Archdiocese would face a complete upending of their traditional way of life. Before the Council, most nuns lived in a monastery or convent with a community of sisters, other members of their order. A vast majority in the Archdiocese of Boston taught in parochial schools. Their day was centered around a structured prayer life, with formulaic Latin prayers being said communally at recurring times.

The Congregation of St. Joseph was one of the largest religious communities of nuns operating in the Boston Archdiocese. Most members entering during the 1950s and 1960s hailed from large Irish Catholic families and had been educated by Sisters of St. Joseph themselves.[106] Despite the harshness and rigidity of religious life, the order continued extensive growth up until the post-Conciliar period. These sisters felt called to a life of service and sacrifice. In the tradition of female religious orders in the Catholic Church, they desired a life of austerity, in the hopes of growing in holiness through penance, prayer, and charity. This way of life may have been difficult, but this was only expected by nuns entering the religious life in the 1950s. As one Boston nun said, "Christ himself had come to earth to suffer. He commanded that all those who wished to follow him had to take up their cross as well."[107]

[106] Sister Catherine Decker and Sister Elizabeth Joseph, interview with the author, St. Joseph's Convent (Medford), November 2017.
[107] Sister Elizabeth, interview with the author, St. Joseph's Convent (Medford), November 2017.

The main challenge on their path to salvation were external influences found in the world. Dangerous ideas were kept outside the convent by strict controls on the information which nuns were given access to. They were forbidden from reading the newspaper or watching the television. Family members could visit the convent only once a month. Aside from this, contact with the sisters' former lives was strictly regulated. Visits to family were only granted in the most extreme circumstances. An example from St. Clement's, a parish in Medford with an attached convent and parochial school, captures the severity with which these rules were enforced. In the 1950s, the co-ed St. Clement's High School was the source of a steady stream of vocations to the Congregation of St. Joseph. A local Medford girl and graduate of St. Clement's felt the call to leave her family home and enter the convent. Soon after beginning her novitiate, she was told that her mother was sick and dying. Despite the seriousness of her mother's health situation, the Mother Superior would not give the young sister permission to visit her family's home located just across the street. Eventually, the situation became desperate and permission did come. The novice was allowed to travel to her nearby family house. Like all travel outside of the convent, this was done with another nun there to serve as chaperone. This was a rule for all the nuns of the monastery, regardless of age or status. Accompanied by this elder sister, the novice arrived at the doorstep of her childhood home. The visit had come only moments too late however and she received the unfortunate news that her mother had just passed away. She did not have the chance to enter the house. Her chaperone, hearing the news, immediately escorted her back to the convent.[108]

[108] Fr. Paulo Cumin, interview with the author, St. Clements's Parish (Medford), May 2017.

The advent of Vatican II would change all of this. Like their priestly counterparts, many nuns now felt that they had a duty to engage more fully with the world. These women believed that the "Council Fathers had said that we must broaden our view."[109] Nuns felt the need to go back to the original spirit of their Orders' vocations, which many in each congregation believed entailed leaving their individual convents and having more access to the outside world. A focus on social justice and service would now come into vogue. The original prayer rule was scrapped throughout the Archdiocese. Rather than praying a set prayer communally at recurring times throughout the day, prayer would become much less guided and was not so much a communal recitation as an individual meditation experience. Each nun could now choose their own daily meditations. Before the Council, women were given a new name upon entering religious life. This centuries old rule was overturned, and those who had joined before the Council were given the opportunity to reclaim their birth name. [110] These changes were all seen as the modernization of the order.

The types of work nuns did was greatly expanded upon. Many felt called to more than just teaching, and believed that the spirit of Vatican II had opened up a new space for them outside of the convent. A *Boston Globe* article from 1975 chronicles the transition of Sister Louise Kearns and Sister Mary Mulligan of the Sisters of Notre Dame from the traditional teaching role encompassed by their positions as nuns, to one fully focused on social work and living with the poor. These sisters believed that Vatican II had called for a re-examination of their religious vocations. During this process they came to feel that the traditional, regulated

[109] Sr. Elizabeth Joseph interview.
[110] Ibid.

lifestyle within the convent was composed of "impersonal communal surroundings with little room for personal growth." The major religious congregations of Boston each took part in a period of reflection following the Council's conclusion. During this time, many sisters felt similarly called to leave the convent and become more involved in , "the world's social, economic, and political orders."[111] This entailed living in smaller groups of women, rather than among the dozens of nuns concentrated in the large convents, living by a common prayer rule as had been the traditional organization of female religious life. Many chose to move out to smaller apartments, often in inner-city neighborhoods, with two or three other sisters. While most remained teachers, many nuns instead became involved in "work with the elderly and family counseling."[112]

While most younger nuns were eager and excited over the change that was in the air, those who had spent their entire lives in the traditional convent were not so certain.[113] When given the option to leave their convent and move into new apartment-style housing about 800 of the 1,000 Sisters of Notre Dame chose to remain at the Order's motherhouse in Ipswich, Massachusetts, thus "rejecting the new Vatican II communities of nuns living in apartments and (smaller, dispersed) church convents."[114] The spirit of change often led to questioning among younger nuns of aspects of religious life which had earlier seemed quite certain. In the Congregation of St. Joseph, a group of sisters caused fierce controversy by calling into question the exact nature of their commitment to the Order. In the Catholic Church, religious life was

[111] Kay Longcope, "Nuns Moving into New Social Roles." *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), Oct. 10, 1975.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.

considered a state in which a person took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience to a superior. Some younger nuns, inspired by the spirit of liberation they felt Vatican II called for, began arguing that the vows they had took were really closer to "promises" and thus not as binding. This would become important, as in the years following the Council an exodus of women from the religious life would shake the entire American Church, hitting the Archdiocese of Boston hard.[115]

## The Priest in His Parish

While women religious were seeking to transform their orders, progressive young priests were attempting to transform entire parishes and bring them into line with the vision of Vatican II. A liberal priest of the Vatican II generation could quickly implement his vision of the *Council's* reforms in whichever Church he was stationed. Conservative priests could also maintain islands of tradition at their own parishes. The Council Fathers at Vatican II had desired to increase the power of the laity in governing the Church, and had even called them the "People of God."[116] The Council purported to reduce clericalism, or priestly control over the totality of Catholic life. This effort failed, and priests still maintained an overwhelming power in shaping the culture and practice of the individual parishes at which they served.

The example of St. Margaret's Catholic Church in Beverly illustrates the power individual priests had to shape the style of their congregations. At this particular church, located on the North Shore of Massachusetts, a new assistant pastor had been appointed during the late

[115] Sister Catherine Decker and Sister Elizabeth, interview with the author, St. Joseph's Convent (Medford), November 2017.
[116] "Gaudium et Spes," *Vatican.va*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

1960s. He was "enthusiastic about Vatican II", and quickly began implementing liturgical reforms which he believed were called for by the Council. Following the spirit rather than the exact wording of the Council's documents, he often added new twists to liturgical rites and activities in order to bring these traditional parish events into line with what he saw as the purpose of the reforms. The rite of First Communion is a sacrament of the Catholic Church in which children receive the bread, the Eucharist, at Mass for the first time. Children traditionally wear white suits and dresses for this solemn event. The assistant pastor determined that children should be able to give communion to their parents during the ceremony. He implemented this practice despite the fact that it was unheard of in Catholic tradition. While the pastor was hoping to allow parents to become more involved in the sacrament, while also increasing the children's own role and agency in accordance with the Council's call for increased participation from the laity, the new element of the rite was viewed as bizarre and unseemly by many parishioners.[117]

However, few complained as the attitude of deference to the will of the priest remained. In June of 1973, a more conservative priest was called to St. Margaret's to become head pastor. By this time, it had become a prime example of a reformed parish. However, the new pastor was on the conservative side of the priestly spectrum. He had been ordained in 1948, and was aghast at the changes taking place throughout the Archdiocese in the name of the Council. He decided that for his parishioners he would restore the old traditions and "just give them the Catholic teaching." St. Margaret's would become a bastion of Pre-Vatican

[117] Fr. Albert Contanz, interview with the author, Regina Cleri Priest's Home (Boston), November, 2017.

practices and catechism.[118] Such situations were repeated in many churches, leading to the unheard of practice in which Catholics would shop around different churches in the Archdiocese, picking those which met their liturgical and doctrinal preferences, rather than attending Mass at their local parish. A diocesan spokesman explained to the *Boston Globe* in 1975 that one result of the Council was "a tendency among parishioners to seek parishes that are either more traditional or more progressive rather than sticking with their territorial parish."[119]

## The Exodus

In the early 1970s Father John O'Donnell was enjoying his first assignment at a suburban parish to the south of Boston. Each Sunday night he would meet another priest friend from the area for dinner. Both men realized that tremendous change had just been unleashed upon the institution to which they had dedicated their lives. Fr. O'Donnell was embracing this fact, and had become caught up in the Liturgical and Ecumenical movements. His friend was not so certain. At dinner he explained, "We were trained in the pre-Vatican II church to have conservative guts. We were trained to conserve the ritual, which had been brought along through Tradition. But most of us now have liberal heads."[120] Entering the ancient, tradition-bound Catholic Church, both men had expected the institution to remain as such throughout their lifetime. Their early training in the late 1950s had prepared them for this, before taking a

[118] Fr. Albert Contanz interview.
[119] Kay Longcope, "Vatican II: Has is brought Man Closer to the Church?" *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), September 21, 1975.
[120] Fr. John O'Donnell interview.

sharp turn towards openness and liberalizing reforms around the time of their ordination in 1963.

Many priests were now torn, unsure of what the future of the Church would look like or where they would fit in it. An exodus of men from the priesthood was on the horizon. The trickle abandoning the cassock in the late 1960s would become a flood by the 1970s. This priest would become part of that wave. About a month after he had spoken with Fr. O'Donnell about his uncertainties, he called his friend to to explain to him that he was leaving the priesthood. He had decided that he could not deal with the "internalized conflict, when your conservative gut meets your liberal head."[121]

The religious life in general began facing headwinds at this time. Every story was different, but among both priests and nuns two opposite motivating factors were pushing people away from the Church. Most had entered their state in life ready for the rigors and sacrifice which being a priest or nun entailed. The reforms of Vatican II opened up a window. The possibility of change was alluring and many became caught up in the various movements which were presenting new ways of being Catholic. Rejecting traditional methods of prayer and liturgy, and emphasizing social work and political action, these seemed very modern and aligned to the culture of American society, in contrast to the staid and semi-medieval outlook of the pre-Vatican II Church. This spirit of reform appealed to many and would come to dominate among both the priests and the religious orders of nuns in the Archdiocese of Boston. For those who could not adjust to the pace of change, exit was often the option.

[121] Ibid.

On the other end of the spectrum, many priests and nuns savored change. Their hopes and aspirations for even more radical reforms eventually drove these members out of the Church, as for them the pace of change as managed by Cardinal Cushing and his successor Cardinal Humberto Medeiros came to be considered too slow. It is difficult with any accuracy to pinpoint which force was greater in convincing priests and nuns to sacrifice their vocation. Across the United States, ten thousand priests resigned between 1967 and 1977, and the effects of this trend were present in the Archdiocese of Boston.[122]

[122] James Franklin, "Counseling for priests." *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), October 23, 1977.

# Chapter 3: The Laity and the Mass

**"Emitte Spiritum tuum, et creabuntur, et renovabis faciem terra. Alleluja." Alleluia verse, Feast of Pentecost in the Latin Mass**

It was to be a New Pentecost in the Archdiocese of Boston. So proclaimed the small, square pamphlets published by the Boston Sacramental Apostolate in May of 1966 in the wake of the Second Vatican Council.[123] The Catholic feast of Pentecost is celebrated 50 days after the conclusion of Easter to commemorate the descent of the Holy Spirit on Christ's Twelve Apostles. According to the Book of Acts, following the crucifixion of Jesus his closest followers were gathered together behind locked doors in a house in Jerusalem. They feared persecution from the religious authorities within the city. Gathered to celebrate the Jewish feast of Pentecost, their celebration was interrupted when a sudden, strong wind filled the house. The Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity in Catholic theology, then came upon those gathered in the form of tongues of fire, alighted upon their heads and led them to cry out in strange languages. Inspired by the Spirit, these followers were given the necessary gifts to proclaim the Gospel to the world.

By referring to the events of the recently concluded Second Vatican Council as a "New Pentecost", the organizers of the Archdiocese's Sacramental Apostolate were making no small claim. This feast is considered the anniversary of the Church's founding. Proclaiming a "New Pentecost" for the Church was comparable in many ways to the French revolutionaries proclaiming the year 1792 as Year One on their own calendar. Invoking Pentecost called upon similar themes of renewal and rebirth within Church history. The "New Pentecost" pamphlet

[123] "New Pentecost Booklet", May 3, 1966, Liturgical Movement Collection, Archive of the Archdiocese of Boston.

explained that the Spirit of renewal would be manifesting itself most importantly in one aspect of Catholic life, announcing that "the restoration of the liturgy is rightly held to be a sign of the providential designs of God in our time, as a movement of the Holy Spirit in His Church."[124] Liturgy is a term used among theologians to describe the public worship performed by the Church. Events such as weddings, confirmation services, and the ordination of priests fall within the category of liturgy. However, the pamphlet was referring to one aspect of Catholic worship in particular, the Mass. This was the central rite of the Church, considered to be a necessary representation of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, in which he had opened the way of salvation by his death. During this service, the priest was believed to turn ordinary bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus. The priest then performed a bloodless offering of this changed substance to God, which he distributed to the community as bread and wine.

## The Latin Mass

On any given Sunday in 1960, at the parish church of Our Lady of Sorrows in Sharon, one could expect the celebration of Mass to be the same. At 10am, the Catholic residents of the city, many former "Townies" from the heavily Irish sections of Boston or newly arrived, college-educated suburbanites, would gather together for the the celebration of Mass.[125] Parishioners filed in along the aisles, finding their way to familiar spots in the pews. Many came to Mass hungry, having begun fasting the night before in preparation to receive communion that day in accord with Church law. Small bowls of blessed Holy Water near the entrances were the first

[124] Ibid.
[125] Fr. John O'Donnell interview

stop on the way into church, and everyone made sure to dip their fingers in before making the sign of the cross.

The pews of the church began filling up about a half hour before Mass. Women young and old were bedecked in white and black chapel veils and carried rosary beads for use during the celebration. Adult men brought their *St. Andrew's Daily Missals*, small, sturdy books which included the readings for each day's Mass with the Latin on one side and formal, sacral English translations on the other.[126] The younger members of the parish had their own simpler versions of this popular book. Such missals were a relatively new presence in Mass, becoming an important feature of Catholic worship only in the 1930s and 1940s due to their promotion by liturgical experts and reformers. Many old-timers refused to accept the fad, and they could be identified by the rosaries they had in hand. All genuflected and remained on their knees in preparatory prayer. Suddenly the silence would be broken by the sound of a bell. All knew that this was the signal: Mass had begun.

The pastor of this church in particular celebrated the Mass with formality and grandeur. A "Roman to boot" in matters of liturgy due to his priestly formation in the Eternal City, Father Daniel O'Connell's services evoked the splendor of the heart of Catholicism.[127] He entered the Church bedecked in lace and a sumptuous chasuble depicting the Sacred Heart of Mary. Surrounded by altar boys, he would make his way down the central aisle towards the altar, a

[126] Ibid.

[127] Ceremonies in the churches of Europe were known for their splendor, which was not always the case in the United States. The American Church was dominated by Irish-Americans. Their own liturgical practice was traditionally simple due to its roots in the Penal Era in Ireland, when Mass. See *Why Catholics Can't Sing* by Thomas Day: Thomas Day, *Why Catholics Can't Sing: The Culture of Catholicism and the Triumph of Bad Taste* (New York: Crossroad Press, 1991), 43.

raised platform located within the building's apse which was the focal point of the church. As the procession meandered forward the choir, composed of parishioners, might try its hand at the Medieval chant hymns of the *Missa de Angelis*, a popular version of the Mass in use across the country.[128] Those in attendance were not expected to join in with the singing because the hymns were both in Latin and required extensive practice and advanced musical knowledge to perform. The choir tried its best, accompanied only by the organ in the back of the church.

The Mass would begin in earnest when Fr. O'Connell ascended the steps to the altar. At his sides, standing parishioners bowed their heads for the man who would soon bring God in the matter of bread and wine into their presence. Fr. O'Connell would open a small gate and pass by the golden altar rail which definitively separated the altar from the pews, the sacred ministers from the congregation. The high altar itself was carved with statues of the saints and reached toward the ceiling. The tabernacle was located here, where the bread and wine are stored between Masses. Facing this focal point of the church, with his back towards the people of the congregation, Fr. O'Connell would begin the formulaic Latin prayers which comprised the Mass. Reciting the language in quick, mumbled tones interspersed with bits of singing, much of what he said would be barely audible to the attendant congregation.

As Fr. O'Connell began the rite upon the altar, the parishioners would start their own private devotions. Those with missals might follow along as best as they could to the quick, quiet Latin of the priest. Most of the women in the parish would pray their rosaries, the most popular devotion in the Church.[129] While meditating on events from the life of Christ these

[128] Day, *Why Catholics Can't Sing,* 43.
[129] Fr. John O'Donnell interview.

women would mumble sets of the *Ave Maria* prayer, asking for the aid of the mother of Jesus. At some points, the priest would turn briefly to face the congregation, sometimes to cense the altar with incense or address the deacon, a lower ranking ordained minister. Dialogue would occur between the priest, the other ministers on the altar, the altar boys, and the choir. Most of the congregation believed the rite before them to be the same which Jesus and his Apostles had performed hundreds of years ago at the Last Supper.[130]

Following a ritual in which the deacon and priest sang readings in Latin from the Epistles and the Gospels, Fr. O'Connell would walk up to the pulpit on the left-side of the altar and begin to speak in English for the first time during the service. In this way, the sermon would begin. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the topics of each sermon differed little from church to church across the Archdiocese of Boston. Common subjects included the importance of belief in the True Presence of Christ in the Eucharist or the Blessed Virgin Mary and the role she held as an intercessor for Christians before God.[131] Sermons could also focus on sin and parishioners would often be reminded of the necessity of confession and the very real prospect of hell. A common thread tying all of these sermons together was their distinctively "Catholic" emphasis. In contrast to their Protestant neighbors, Catholics believed that the priest really did make Christ present during their service in the bread and wine. Furthermore, Catholics were supposed to pray to saints so that these holy figures, now in Heaven with God, would intercede for them at his throne. Catholics also needed to confess their sins to a priest for salvation. Such ideas were anathema to most Protestants, but were the core of Catholic sermons in the Boston

[130] Mark Massa, S.J., *The American Catholic Revolution: How the Sixties Changed the Church Forever* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), XV.
[131] O'Connor, *Boston Catholics,* 212.

area before the Vatican Council.[132] The readings which the priest or deacon said each day at Mass followed a one-year cycle. This bred familiarity among the laity with the readings for each day, despite the fact that they were in Latin. Fr. O'Connell also contributed to this element of regularity in Our Lady of Sorrows Parish by following a common practice of the time. Rather than writing his own sermons, each was taken from a book of famous sermons. Thus, each day of the year would not only have its own designated readings and prayers in Latin, but also a specific sermon in English.[133]

Following the sermon Fr. O'Connell would begin to confect the Eucharist, calling down the presence of God so that what appeared as just bread and wine to the congregation would truly become the Body and Blood of Jesus. The choir would occasionally join in, singing the prayers as Fr. O'Connell continued working through the rites of the Mass. This brought the service to its climax as Father O'Connell held up the thin, unleavened piece of bread, the Host, while remaining with his back toward the congregation and facing away from the faithful. Soon after he would make his way down the altar towards the altar rail. Those congregants who had confessed recently and were certain of having no serious, mortal sin on their conscience, would come up to receive communion.

Processing from their seats, parishioners would approach the altar rail and kneel. Fr. O'Connell would then walk solemnly along the rail carrying a bowl filled with tiny hosts, the Eucharist. Beside him an altar boy carried a gold plate holding it underneath the priest's hands to ensure that no piece of the precious bread touched the ground, which would be considered

[132] Ibid.
[133] Fr. John O'Donnell interview.

a terrible sacrilege. When Fr. O'Connell approached, communicants would raise their heads, open their mouths, and holding their tongues out receive the Eucharist. In Latin the priest exhorted them, "Corpus Dominum nostri Jesu Christi custodiat animam tuam in vitam aeternam Amen," meaning "May the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ preserve your soul unto everlasting life." The communicant did not respond. Rather taking the host gently on their tongue, without chewing, they waited for it to disintegrate as they filed back to their seats and resumed kneeling.[134] Following this central ceremony, the priest would utter the famous dismissal, saying in Latin "Ite missa est," the Mass has ended.

## The New Mass

Thus concluded the celebration of the Roman rite, the method of worship of the Diocese of Rome, the seat of the Catholic Church and the dominant form of Mass within Western Christendom. This rite traced its roots back to the earliest days of Christian antiquity. Yet, as shown earlier, strong factions within the hierarchy now believed that the Mass was in need of reform. Parishioners at Our Lady of Sorrows, and many others throughout the Archdiocese of Boston, were just as surprised as many older priests were at the changes soon to be enacted on the Mass. For them, these changes could be even more shocking as this was their primary experience of their Catholic faith. Older priests were allowed to continue saying private Masses for themselves. Older laity had no such concession. The hallowed rite would be gradually changed through expansion of the vernacular and the abolition of parts of the Mass deemed vestigial or to be accretions.

[134] Fr. Ed Carroll interview.

In December of 1971 Cardinal Humberto Medeiros of Boston banned public celebration of the Latin Mass. Beginning in March of 1970, the new form of the Roman rite, known officially as the *Norvus Ordo*, yet referred to by Catholics across the country as the "new Mass," had commenced in the Archdiocese of Boston. Attending Mass in this new rite was guaranteed to be a different experience for Catholics who had attended the Latin Mass. Reforms had begun by allowing use of English for the Gospel readings, but soon expanded and culminated in the promulgation of the entirely new *Norvus Ordo Missae,* outlining the structure of the new rite, in 1970.[135]

At Church on Sunday in 1971, Catholics would find a world transformed in aesthetic, practice and ritual. An example of the vast changes Catholics might see in their religious practice is offered by the parish of St. Agnes in Reading. This church had once been one of the most ornate in the entire Archdiocese, and it was filled with statues of the saints, realistically carved and painted. In the decade following the Council these had been removed. Other sights seen during weekly Latin Mass would be missing across the Archdiocese in the new Mass as well. Many women continued to wear veils, but among younger parishioners this was uncommon and by the 1980s unheard of. The *St. Andrews Daily Missal* had become obsolete in more ways than one. Latin continued to play a role in Masses through the 1960s, but by the mid-1970's had been almost completely phased out, making a missal with translations unnecessary. Furthermore, the Church had reformed not only the calendar of feasts and saints' days, but also the lectionary. This book set the readings for each daily service, taking passages

[135] Reid, *T&T Clark Companion to the Liturgy,* 456.

from the books of the Bible. A major change instituted by Rome had implemented a completely new cycle of readings. The one-year cycle had been replaced by a three-year cycle. This allowed a much greater portion of the Bible to be read across each year, but also ensured that parishioners had little idea of which passage would be read on any given day.[136]

Changes had gone far beyond the translation of the older form of the Mass into English. The commencement of the celebration was no longer announced by a bell. Rather, Mass now began with an "Entrance Hymn." The change in the sounds of the service was a radical departure from the Catholic tradition. In the 1960s hymns in the vernacular were rare but not unheard of in American Catholic services.[137] The rapid transition to Mass in English left the Church with few traditional Catholic hymns in the vernacular to use. This led to the rapid adoption of the contemporary music of American Protestant worship. [138] The once lonely organ, considered the only acceptable instrument for use during Mass, was quickly joined by the piano, and even guitars and drums in some parishes. The Gregorian chants and commonplace Latin hymns such as Schubert's *Ave Maria* were replaced by folksy and sentimental religious ballads of the era such as "Kumbaya, Michael, Row the Boat Ashore…and Let There Be Peace on Earth."[139]

The change in the tone for the celebration would be apparent from the new vestments the Archdiocese's priests began to adopt following the Council. No longer dressed in lace and chasuble, priests wore green, violet, or red robes depending on the season. These were worn

[136] Fr. Thomas Powers, interview with the author, St. Barbara's Church (Woburn), Oct 2017.
[137] Day, *Why Catholics Can't Sing*, 29.
[138] Ibid., 31
[139] Ibid.

over a simple white tunic. The Mass began with the priest placing himself behind the table-altar at the center of the apse and facing toward the congregation. The first words were no longer in Latin, rather the priest would proclaim, "The Lord be with you" to which the congregation was now expected to respond, "And also with you." A polite greeting directed toward the congregation would follow. Or, the priest could begin immediately with the formulas of the service. A liturgical diversity unheard of before the reforms to the Mass would descend upon the entire Archdiocese of Boston, with variations in celebration from parish to parish according to the preference of the local pastor.

The starkest example of change in the new Mass would certainly be the use of the vernacular. In the pre-Vatican II Mass, the only use of English would occur during the sermon. While some parishioners who had attended Catholic schools might have a little classroom experience with the Latin language, this was not the case for the majority. During the 1930s the popularity of missals had opened up the action of the Mass to a much wider audience through translations, and these were particularly common in the Archdiocese of Boston.[140] The English of the new Mass was also quite different from the solemn and sacral translations utilized within the missals of the day.

Aside from the use of vernacular, one of the most noticeable changes would come in relation to the rite of Communion. Once, the tabernacle had been the focal point of the church architecturally, located centrally in the high altar. At St. Agnes, as in many churches, the tabernacle was now located in a side chapel. Following the priest's sermon and the Bible readings for that Sunday the priest would begin to confect the Bread and Wine, changing them

[140] This trend was cited by two priests, Fr. John O'Donnell and Fr. Ed Carroll.

into the Body and Blood of Jesus. At this part of the service certain members of the congregation would begin to rise. These men and women would ascend the altar, now much more accessible due to the removal of the altar rail, which had also occurred in most parishes. The priest would then hand these "Extraordinary Eucharistic Ministers" small golden bowls filled with hosts. As the rest of the congregation filed up, these members of the Church had the responsibility of distributing communion, a role once restricted solely to ordained ministers. Approaching in long lines, the manner of receiving communion was now a matter of personal preference. Some members might kneel, and holding their head up receive the host on their tongue, maintaining the traditional practice. However, most received standing up by taking communion in their hands.

The last reform to the Roman rite of the Mass had occurred during the 16th century Council of Trent. It involved "little substantial change" to the actual Mass and, "produced nothing radically new."[141] This is in sharp contrast to the reforms of the Mass that followed the Second Vatican Council. What must be remembered is that *Sancrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy promulgated on December 4, 1963 by the Fathers of the Vatican Council, "did not explicitly order the drastic restructuring of the Roman liturgy that actually ensued."[142] Rather, the document outlined principles for a reform to the Mass, such as advocating greater use of the vernacular in liturgical worship, a return to the preeminence of Gregorian chant in the music of the Mass, promotion of active lay participation in the Mass, and the promotion of Christian unity through reforms to the Mass. The document gave no direct

[141] Alcuin Reid, *The Organic Development of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 18.
[142] Hull, *Banished Heart*, 6.

mandates for any specific reforms to the structure of the rite itself. It was not until 1964 that the new Pope Paul VI organized a body of liturgists called the *Consilium* to produce a revised missal implemented under the guiding principles of *Sancrosanctum Concilium*.[143] It was only "once the *Consilium* was in charge of directing the liturgical renewal" that "structural changes to the immemorial rite began to be made."[144]

The New Mass of Pope Paul VI added elements, such as the kiss of peace, in which parishioners were expected to shake hands, hug, or make some other sign of concord with other congregants in the pews. Parts of the Mass such as the Last Gospel, a reading from the first Gospel of John proclaimed at the end of every Mass, were abolished. Despite this fact, the changes in the services of the Archdiocese of Boston still might have preserved the tone and spirit of the earlier Tridentine Mass. In regions outside of the United States, "there was on the whole more resistance to the religious revolution" and "many of popular traditions of pre-Conciliar Catholicism" such as "festivals of the saints, traditional forms of singing, Marian devotions (the Rosary)" and others were maintained across churches in Europe, Asia and Latin America. In contrast, the Archdiocese of Boston faced a violent rupture in the liturgical practice of the local church during this same period.[145]

## The Laity and the Council

How were the laity of Boston to respond to such radical change? What sources did they look to for guidance in this turbulent period? Lay Catholics could turn to the secular press,

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[143] "Sancrosanctum Concilium," *Vatican.va*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-i_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html

[144] Hull, *Banished Heart*, 8.

[145] Ibid., 320.

which in Boston was covering the Council extensively. The *Boston Globe* reported on the event with enthusiasm. It was from these sources that most Catholics received their information about the Council and its effects. Within the Church, the official communications channels which the hierarchy of the Archdiocese used to make its opinions known to the laity were celebrating the new rites and reforms, critiquing elements of the pre-Vatican II Church, and arguing for the patient acceptance of any and all changes by the laity. The Archdiocesan newspaper, *The Pilot* was the official voice of Cardinal Cushing himself and the paper's weekly editions could be found near the entrance of every church in the Archdiocese. The *Pilot* maintained a progressive bent throughout the period of reforms, taking a particularly harsh stance toward the prevalence of traditional devotions among lay Catholics.

The Archdiocese also hosted many public events to explain Vatican II to the laity. An example of this type of event would be the study days for which the "New Pentecost" pamphlets were produced. The speakers chosen to interpret the Council and the changes in the Mass which resulted were often enthusiastic participants or spectators of Vatican II. Many had just returned from Rome and were excited by the prospects for change they believed had been opened up by the Council. This set the tone of the message the laity of Boston would receive about the activities of the Second Vatican Council. One prominent study day organized by the Sacramental Apostolate in the Spring of 1964 hosted Michael Novak, an observer just back from Rome who had published his observations of the Council in a book entitled *The Open Church*.[146] In the book he detailed his own experiences of the turbulent third session of Vatican II in which such controversial topics as religious liberty and the Catholic Church's relation to the Jewish

[146] Michael Novak, *The Open Church* (New York, Routledge, 2017).

faith were discussed and resolved in favor of the Council's liberals. Novak's lecture was entitled "Liturgical Renewal and Social Action." It examined one of the themes favored by progressives, an increased focus on the role of the church in social action and the importance of the Mass as a source of formation of the laity in preparation for social work. Now the laity were hearing this same message proposed to them, a stark change from the purpose of the Mass as it was understood in the pre-Conciliar period, as a presentation of Christ's sacrifice on the cross offered by the priest in the form of the bread and wine. The Mass was now to have a utilitarian purpose, oriented towards social action.

A similar process had been filtered to the clergy through the voices and perspectives of some of its most progressive participants, who had come to speak at St. John's Seminary and at similar clerical events throughout the Archdiocese. The religious of the Archdiocese who imbibed this message would also be providing much of the guidance to laity on the meaning of the Vatican Council. This group included all of the ordained and professed religious serving the Archdiocese of Boston, and was composed of both parish priests and nuns, with heavy contingents of religious orders such as the Jesuits (due to the location of Boston College). Lay Catholics had weekly contact with their parish priest and nuns were also a ubiquitous presence in the Archdiocese. The younger priests who were enthusiastic and had become caught up in the momentum of the time brought a message of liberal reform to their parishes from the the pulpit during the sermon at each Mass.

The hierarchy had other channels with which to inculcate the proper understanding of the Council and its changes to the laity. In the Spring of 1966, the Boston Sacramental Apostolate produced a course of study to be used by CCD groups throughout the Archdiocese

during the upcoming semester of classes. CCD, the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, was the primary mode of religious education for young Catholics who did not attend Catholic schools, and thus did not receive regular lessons in theology. Entire weeks of new course material focusing strictly on the the work of Vatican II and the importance of the new rite of Mass, as interpreted by one of the most progressive groups in the Archdiocese, was made mandatory study material for a large portion of the Archdioceses' youth.[147]

Catholics looking for information and explanations of the Council outside of official church sources or their parishes could find answers in the leading local newspaper of the day, the *Boston Globe*. Since preparations for a Council had first been announced by Pope John XXIII in 1959 the paper had been following its development with heady enthusiasm. Combining elements of excitement and its slight anti-Catholic bent with a utopian idealism in regard to the potential consequences of the ecumenical Council, the *Globe* would provide Catholics with a progressive portrayal of Vatican II which meshed nicely with the Archdiocesan hierarchy's own official pronouncements. Catholics would be able to read in the *Globe* about the debates being held among the Council Fathers in Rome. The importance of this experience cannot be underestimated. The firmness of the Catholic Church in regards to doctrine in the 1950s had not allowed for the questioning of Church teaching by the laity or the clergy. Thus, to see almost all aspects of Catholic life, which had once appeared certain and unchanging, such as the importance of Mary in the Church or the use of Latin in the Mass, subjected to debate and scrutiny by Church's own leaders was disorienting for many Catholics.

[147] "Sacramental Apostolate Secretary's Report", January, 1966. Liturgical Movement Collection, Archive of the Archdiocese of Boston.

The *Globe* covered these debates assiduously throughout the four sessions of the Council and each discussion of doctrine would be placed by the *Globe* within a broader narrative of conflict among the bishops of the Church. The tone of the Council's coverage was determined by the conclusion of the first session in 1962. An article published by the paper summarizing this first meeting proclaimed that, "Reformers faced traditionalists at Ecumenical Council—and Won." This title captures the essence of the narrative in which the Council would be presented to Catholics by the secular media, as a battle between liberals and conservatives. Catholics were probably unaware of the types of doctrinal splits which separated members of the clergy and intellectuals within the Church before the Second Vatican Council. For the most part, the Archdiocese of Boston had always presented a united front on doctrine, and obedience to the hierarchy was one of the key foundations of the Church. Dissent was almost unheard of. Now, not only could Catholics see a battle was occurring at the Council, playing out across the pages of the *Boston Globe*, it was also clear that Vatican II was a defining event in Church history as well, heralding the dawn of a new era.[148]

The 1962 summary article continued by predicting that, "while it may be too early to say that this is the end of the counter-reformation age that began at Trent exactly four centuries ago…a major change in the atmosphere of the whole church is clearly underway." Both the hierarchy and the secular media thus foresaw a "New Pentecost" for the Catholic Church. All aspects of the Council would be framed within this perspective by the *Globe*, and Catholics could glean an interpretative frame through reading the *Globe* in which the Council was a force

[148] Leo Wollemborg, "Reformists Faced Traditionalists at Ecumenical Council-and Won," *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), December 16, 1962.

for modernization and positive progress. In its articles the paper addressed all of the major issues addressed by the Council. On questions of the liturgy, Catholics would read that reforms to the Mass such as broader use of English were, "Roman Catholicism's greatest reform in worship in 1700 years" and that they would make services, "more meaningful" by "cutting out accretions of the past."[149] A familiar figure of authority in the church, a Catholic priest, would become one of the *Globe's* most commonly featured sources on the Council and its meaning. Rev. Frederick McManus, a native of Swampscott and a key participant in the Council and in the creation of the New Mass, would write many articles on the subject of the Council for the paper. He explained that the Council was causing, "a revolution in Roman Catholic practice and even more important, a revolution in Roman Catholic attitudes." The Council had, "opened the doors of the Church to the world" creating opportunities for widespread spiritual renewal.[150]

Catholics could see that the changes they were experiencing placed within the world-historical perspective provided by the *Globe* and other secular media sources. All of these changes were presented in a positive light. The heroes in the *Globe's* telling of the Council were never in doubt. Those Catholics who promoted "American values" and favored an accommodation with Protestantism were the "liberals." There was a patriotic component manifested in the representation of bishops and their theological beliefs. It was mainly, "conservative senior clerics from Spain and Italy" while progressives were from, "the United States and Britain." These progressives stood for modernization of the Church's teaching and accommodation with Protestantism. It was these men who had saved the first session of the

[149] "Major Catholic Reform," *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), December 5, 1963.
[150] Fr. Frederick McManus, "New Renewal Carried Forward," *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA) December 11, 1966.

Council from the Roman curia, who were depicted as a minority representing an old, strictly European type of Catholicism associated with the index of forbidden books and the inquisition.[151]

This characterization was most clear when the Council was debating the subject of religious freedom. The discussions on religious freedom were held during the third session of the Vatican Council. The debate was presented as a fight between the liberal American and Northern European bishops facing Southern Europeans. While the document which this conflict produced, *Dignitatis Humanae*, was an effort at compromise and did not abandon the formulation of the traditional Catholic doctrine, its lack of clarity opened the door for the belief in an unrestricted freedom of religion, which was enthusiastically seized upon and presented in the *Boston Globe* as, "an achievement for democracy." Catholics getting their information about the Council from these sources, and following the lead of the hierarchy's own interpretation, would understand the importance of the reforms to the Church as necessary step in modernizing the Church and harmonizing its mission with that of the liberal, democratic order predominant in the United States. [152]

One of the most important aspects of the Council emphasized by the hierarchy and the secular media was its role in promoting ecumenical relations among Christian denominations. Expectations of impressive steps towards complete Christian reconciliation, especially between Catholics and Protestants, can be seen throughout the paper's coverage of Vatican II. In 1959, one of the first articles following the announcement of the Council proclaimed that the, "Pontiff

[151] George M. Collins, "An Achievement for Democracy", *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA) September 22, 1965.
[152] Ibid.

Seeks Christian Church Reunion" while cautioning that, "the best that can be hoped is" that "perhaps a little advance toward the reunion of Christianity would be made."[153] As the Council continued, the paper's view of this ecumenical role would become more positive. In a 1961 article, a year before the Council's opening, *Globe* writer Ed Kiestler asked "Should our Churches Unite?" emphasizing that the Vatican Council had been "directed by Pope John XXIII to devote special attention to healing the splits of Christendom" before enumerating the tangible steps that could be taken by the Christian churches to become one church.[154] A steady stream of such articles continued throughout the period. In October of 1963, the *Globe* would even commence a weekly series of reports on "how non-Roman Catholics view the progress towards unity made…by the Vatican Council" Throughout the Council's sessions, the *Globe* continued to promote an enthusiastic narrative that the Council was leading to "a new era of Christian partnership."[155] Boston Catholics reading the newspaper regularly for their updates on the Council would find it hard to believe it had any more important goal or encompassed anything less than the first steps toward the complete reunification of the Christian churches. The Boston *Pilot* maintained a similar optimism and encouraged Catholics to pray for the Council most especially "for the reunion of our separated brethren of the Eastern churches and Protestant groups."[156]

With the hierarchy and the secular media proposing a certain vision of the Council, it is not surprising that open acts of rebellion by the laity against the reforms in the Archdiocese

[153] Barret McGurn, "Pontiff Seeks Christian Church Reunion," *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), October 27, 1959.
[154] Ed Kiestler, "Should Our Churches Unite?" *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), December 21, 1961.
[155] Associated Press, "Special Report," *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), October 26, 1963.
[156] Fr. Francis X. Weiser, "Why Pray for the Ecumenical Council" *Pilot* (Boston, MA), August 11, 1962.

were not forthcoming. Unease and discomfort with the new rituals was widespread, but many lay Catholics felt they could only express this in areas of discretion and privacy. At a Lithuanian ethnic parish in South Boston, elderly parishioners would explain their doubts over the new Mass to their young young assistant pastor Father Contanz only in the confessional. The Sacrament of Reconciliation, a rite of the Church in which Catholics tell their sins to a priest in order to receive forgiveness, is sealed by canon law. Therefore, a priest cannot reveal the sins they hear confessed by the penitent, even under court order. It was only within this sacrosanct space that Fr. Contanz understood the confusion which was spreading among his parishioners. In particular, the older congregants admitted that they found the new Mass hard to understand, despite the fact that they were now worshipping in their native Lithuanian. The new rite entailed an entirely different manner of worship. No longer were they engaged in their own private devotions within the sacral space created by the priest. Instead they were thrown into an entirely different atmosphere, which emphasized an intellectual understanding of the faith encapsulated in Biblical passages and dialogues between the congregation and the priest, all occurring in the vernacular. This style of worship was more in line with that of their Protestant neighbors, and highlighted the importance of understanding the Bible. But, this was in sharp contrast to the ritualistic act they had participated in since their youth, which had very little content parishioners could directly understand, but managed to convey to many an aura of mystery and divinity which these elderly parishioners had become accustomed to.[157]

With the spirit of ecumenism at the forefront, many priests hoped to downplay elements of Catholicism which were unappealing to American Protestants. Sermons would no

[157] Fr. Albert Contanz interview.

longer focus on the Eucharist, Mary and the saints. Rather, priests attempted to root their homilies in the Bible readings for each Mass. Priests also discouraged devotions which had once been central to Catholic life, such as the Rosary. In infamous episodes throughout the Archdiocese, some parishioners could even have their rosary beads ripped from their hands by progressive priests if they attempted to use them during Mass.[158]

For many lay members of the laity it was these elements unique to Catholic culture which formed the core of their religious identity. Thus, it was often in regard to these aspects of the faith that individuals had the greatest difficulty in accepting the changes being promoted by the hierarchy. Catholic priests found that their parishioners could be particularly intransigent in regards to what the clergy considered "cultural elements" of the faith, in contrast to dogma: revealed truths which required intellectual assent. One priest was frustrated by his parishioners. He found it hard to explain to them that, "changing prayer from Latin to English was not changing dogma."[159] In the turmoil following the Council many aspects of Catholic dogma would be thrown into confusion among the laity due to the dissent which opened up among members of the clergy. This negated the hopes of many liberal priests to instill in their congregations a deeper understanding of Christian teaching through the use of Mass in the vernacular and an emphasis on intellectual comprehension of Christianity through use of the Bible. These methods were held in contrast to popular devotions such as the Rosary or other seemingly superstitious prayers which had dominated pre-Vatican II Catholicism, but were now seen as simply cultural elements which should be discarded.

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[158] Fr. Thomas Powers and Fr. Contanz mentioned such events, though did not name a specific parish at which they had occurred.

[159] Fr. Ed Carroll interview.

A representative example of a treasured Catholic cultural practice which would be abolished only with great difficulty was the tradition of abstaining from meat on Fridays. Prior to the 1960s, Catholics had been required to avoid eating meat on that day as a form of penance. This was in honor of Christ's crucifixion, which had occurred on a Friday. The faithful were ordered to keep this rule on pain of mortal sin, meaning that if they did choose to eat meat on a Friday it was an offense to God resulting in eternal damnation. If they did not later confess their sin to a priest, the salvation of their soul was at stake. During the Conciliar period, the American Church removed this requirement. With motivations typical of the time, the hierarchy hoped that by removing this imposition, it would open up the faithful to make a more conscious decision to practice penance on Fridays. The fear was that Catholics were motivated by an unthinking traditionalism to follow this practice of penance, rather than making a truly conscious decision to abstain from meat.

The removal of the requirement would become one of the common complaints made by Catholics to their parish priests. One priest remembers his congregants swearing that they would never eat meat on Fridays, even if the Pope commanded them to do so.[160] Such examples of dissent, especially explicit dissent from the desires of the Pope himself, were truly unimaginable in the pre-Conciliar Church. Yet now, with treasured traditions and ancient practices being abolished or changed beyond recognition in such a short period of time, Catholics were questioning authority more than ever.

More forceful evidence of dissent from the reforms can be found in the pages of the *Boston Pilot*. While the newspaper's own correspondents were overwhelmingly partisans of the

[160] Fr. Ed Carroll Interview.

agenda of reform, the paper did print many critical letters-to-the-editor from lay Catholics critiquing the changes which were being enacted throughout the Archdiocese during the 1960s. In a 1968 issue of the paper, a Swampscott lay Catholic expressed his own fear that, "the only sin left in the Church is in not being a liberal." He exhorted the Church, "not to deny its past." His nostalgia for the Archdiocese as it existed in previous decades is evident from his writing. Against the priests in the Archdiocese who criticized the Pre-Vatican II Church on the pages of the *Pilot* and from their own pulpits, he wrote that, "The Church of the thirties and forties seemed very relevant indeed to those who lived in it, who attended its devotions, who clutched the Rosary to their hearts in the throes of intense pain, and who encountered God in the hush of the consecration as the priest spoke softly." This man wrote in response to the column of Fr. McBrien, a local priest whose weekly writings in the Pilot would be a source of controversy due to his progressive point of view. This layman's voice captures that of many confused Catholics, upset over the loss of their treasured devotions and practices and the denigration of a pre-Conciliar Church they held dear.[161]

Despite these elements of dissent, it is hard to pinpoint any direct acts of insubordination or outright resistance to the reforms of the Second Vatican Council by the laity in the Archdiocese of Boston. During this time Mass attendance dropped significantly. While Church attendance declined across Christian denominations during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the drop in Catholic practice was even more significant. Many factors could have contributed to this decline, and the sexual revolution and the War in Vietnam certainly helped to weaken the strength of Catholicism in the Archdiocese of Boston. The reforms from the

[161] Laurence Burns, "Letters to the Editor: Horrors!" *The Pilot* (Boston, MA), January 27, 1968.

Second Vatican Council contributed to confusion in a Church which would have had to face challenges and disorientation regardless due to the events of the 1960s themselves.

## The New Laity

For those Catholics who remained, despite initial unease with the pace of changes, the New Mass would quickly become an accepted part of their Catholic life. With the secular media and the hierarchy combining to provide a narrative of necessary progress in the Church, it is not surprising that eventually Catholics would come to accept the reforms. In fact, many priests found that certain segments of the population were very pleased with the changes occurring to the Church. Catholic professionals and members of the upper-middle class in particular found the New Mass appealing. These better educated Catholics found the new Rite "blended better with their culture" and made them less distinct from their Protestant neighbors and colleagues who still retained a large amount of influence in the Boston milieu of the 1960s.[162] Younger people were generally more accepting of change than older parishioners who had grown up in the pre-Conciliar Church, showing a similar generational divide as seen among the clergy.

Obedience was the defining feature of pre-Conciliar Catholicism in the Archdiocese of Boston. Ironically, this element of the Church, which might seem to conflict with the liberalizing spirit of the Vatican Council's reforms, was one of the strongest factors leading the laity to accept reforms with so little dissent. To criticize the Council too strongly would leave one labelled by the mainstream Church and media as both radical and reactionary. There were no respectable Church leaders within the Archdiocese calling for resistance to any of the changes implemented during the 1960s. Conservative priests attempted to adapt to the new Church

[162] Fr. John O'Donnell interview.

while maintaining as many elements of pre-Vatican II Catholicism as possible, and Catholics who found themselves uncomfortable with their young, enthusiastic pastors could find refuge in these parishes. Parish life would no longer be strictly defined as the local community at worship. Catholics would now seek out the Churches that best matched their own sensibility in matters of practice and doctrine.

With old traditions wiped away, a new Mass instituted, and many elements of Catholicism that Protestants found irksome brushed aside, lay Catholics at the dawn of the 1970s had reason to be disoriented with the pace of change. They had not taken the initiative in the process which had occurred. Rather, they had trusted their priests, the old senior pastors who followed each new change without open complaint and the young, enthusiastic partisans of Vatican II. They had listened to the media of the day, both secular and religious, and understood that the reforms were a period of necessary growth the Church must go through in order to become modern. Either way, it was clear there would be no going back. The Old Mass was banned in the Archdiocese. The new Catholic culture which resulted from this period of reform was more fully aligned with the "American values" many associated with their own country. Freedom of conscience and a tolerance for other faiths seemed necessary within the pluralist society of the United States. Less focus on superstitious devotions and religious prayers was more aligned with the tenets of modernity which the forward looking United States embraced with particular fervor in the 1960s. In the new Church many of the barriers between Catholics and their Protestant neighbors had been broken down, and some of the major tensions between being a good Catholic and being a good American had been broken down as well.

# Conclusion

**"What Catholicism rightly sought in America was…liberation from the prison of its traditional culture. There is a bias that has a long history in American Catholicism: the conviction that the traditional Catholic culture in its fullness is at best superfluous to the faith, and at worst a threat."**
***-The Banished Heart*** [163]

In May of 1971, a debate would play out across the pages of the *Boston Globe*. It began with the publishing of an article entitled, "The Americanization of the Catholic Church." The author, *Globe* staff reporter James Stack, described how in the years since the Council, the Church in the Archdiocese of Boston had been, "caught up in a vortex of dramatic change." The new Church which was emerging was, "a clear reflection of American cultural influence." Stack described the ultramodern design of the Immaculate Conception parish church in Weymouth. It had a boxy exterior and theatre-style seating. He explained how many priests no longer wore the cassock, the traditional black robe, or the biretta, a hat once mandated for priests. The implication is that such elements were never truly "American" due to their hearkening back to the Medieval and Baroque periods of European history. Even more than these external changes though, Stack described the internal change which had resulted in a focus on, "social conscience…political involvement. And new worship styles."[164]

Stack described the fruition of the Church imagined both by Cardinal Cushing and the young priests of the Vatican II generation. While the Cardinal, in the end, did not support the most progressive elements of the liberalizing reforms of Vatican II priests in his diocese, he had opened the door to the rapid transformation of his own Archdiocese. By his institution of the

[163] Hull, *Banished Heart*, 244.
[164] James Stack, "The Americanization of the Roman Catholic Church." *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), May 9, 1971.

new Mass and his focus on ecumenical relations, Cushing had unlocked the gates of the Catholic "ghetto" of the pre-Vatican II Church and allowed the Boston Archdiocese to come to an accommodation with the surrounding American culture. The priests and nuns of the Vatican II generation, those who had entered the religious life from the late 1950s to the 1960s, had followed his lead and in many cases taken it even farther. While they had joined a conservative, tradition-bound institution, a majority of them would become intrigued by the spirit of freedom and change resulting from the Second Vatican Council. It was this transformation in attitudes among these priests and nuns which allowed the most liberalizing reforms of the Conciliar period to take shape. Together this cohort would shape new ways of being priests and nuns. They entered politics and engaged in ecumenism on the ground, by joining hands with Protestants and Jews in social justice initiatives and in the pursuit of unity. They celebrated new liturgies in the hopes of better connecting with and shaping contemporary American men and women. The actions of these nuns and priests transformed the Archdiocese, opening it up to modern American life.

The laity had had little say about the extent and pace of these changes. In the turbulence of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Catholic practice in the Archdiocese declined. However, aside from the few hundred who attended Latin Mass at the parishes of Fr. Keane, rebellion and resistance to the reforms of Vatican II was limited. The new roles priests and nuns were taking on in politics troubled individuals in each parish community. The Mass in English left some, especially among older Catholics, disoriented and nostalgic for the Latin Mass. A loss of Catholic identity was felt by many.

It was to speak for these members of the Church that Rev. Robert E. Burns, a priest of the Paulist Fathers, took to the pages of the *Globe* himself to critique the article Stack had written. Rev. Burns described his own experience of the post-Conciliar period and the response of the laity to the reforms being implemented across the Archdiocese. He was certain that, "thousands of Catholics have stopped going to Mass because they are so shocked and scandalized by what is going on in our churches today." Burns was a columnist for a Catholic journal, and so had received hundreds of letters from his readers who were confused and angered by the changes their Church was undergoing. Burns went further and criticized the idea that the reforms which had occurred in the Archdiocese were the authentic result of the Council. He argued that, "far out liturgical innovations in the Church," were being carried out in direct contrast to the true intentions of Vatican II's documents, despite what liberal priests might claim.[165]

It is hard, from an analysis of the documents themselves and the way they were used in the Archdiocese of Boston, to know whether this last point is valid. Cardinal Cushing, a Father of the Council, had determined early on the manner in which reforms would be implemented in his Archdiocese. While at the end of his reign Cushing regretted the rebellion which reform had encouraged in his Archdiocese, he had not ever criticized the changes in practice which these reforms entailed. Dissent, from an extreme traditionalist or extreme progressive perspective, would be dealt with by the hierarchy of the Archdiocese of Boston. This is what led to the

[165] Burns, Robert E. "Letters to the Editor: Americanizing the Church," *Boston Globe* (Boston, MA), May 16, 1971.

expulsion of the seven ringleaders of the St. John's Seminary revolt, and the suspension of Fr. Keane for continuing to say the Latin Mass.

A new Catholicism, navigating between both extremes, was the goal and result of the Vatican II reforms in the Archdiocese of Boston. As reporter James Stack described in his *Globe* article, this new Church was Americanized in practice. Catholics in the Boston area would no longer be challenged by contradictions between maintaining a fully Catholic and "fully American" identity in regards to the issue of religious freedom and separation of church and state. Activism, outreach and social justice work with Protestant and non-Christian neighbors were now possible. A new rite of worship, more closely aligned with that of their Protestant neighbors, celebrated in English, and focusing greater emphasis on the importance of the Bible, would become the default celebration across the Archdiocese. In these ways, the Americanization of the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Boston had been completed.

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