



## Bread and Mortar: The Presence of Roman Catholicism

When the ships of Christopher Columbus brought the first Marranos to the Americas, they sailed under the flag of Catholic Spain. So it was that Roman Catholics were among the first Europeans to set foot in the New World. Supported by the wealth and power of the Spanish throne, Roman Catholic missionaries determined to convert the natives of the newly discovered lands to Christianity, even as they ministered to the soldiers and other colonials who were establishing the territorial claims of New Spain.

### Spanish Missions

As early as 1513, Juan Ponce de Leon made his way into the Florida peninsula. Although no priest accompanied him on the voyage, eight years later he was back, this time with priests to establish missions among the Indians. Understandably, the Indians were hostile to the presence of the foreigners and drove them off. Then, in 1526 two Dominican priests traveling with the party of Vasquez de Ayllon were part of an attempted settlement along the Chesapeake Bay. The settlement failed, as did a series of Spanish ventures in Florida in the following years. Still, by 1565 St. Augustine had been founded, and by 1595 missionary work had begun in earnest. Just over a half century later, the Spanish could boast of nearly forty missions with 26,000 Indians who had heard and accepted the Christian message.

Meanwhile, north of the Gulf of Mexico in the American Southwest, Spanish Catholic missionaries had already begun to work. Francisco Vasquez de Coronado had seen New Mexico in 1540, and three friars from his entourage

remained. When Spain officially took control of New Mexico in 1598, the Franciscans began a ministry there. These missions flourished until the 1630s when they began a slow decline, ending about half a century later in a rebellion by the Native Americans in the area. By 1694, though, the missionaries were back, for Don Diego de Vargas had reconquered the territory, and by 1750 the Spanish counted twenty-two missions and 17,500 Indian converts. Similarly, in southern Arizona the Jesuit Eusebio Francisco Kino (1645–1711) founded San Xavier del Bac in 1700 and, with his fabled journeys that led to the establishment of other missions, claimed to have baptized 30,000 Indians.

In California the Franciscan Junipero Serra (1713–1784) would equal the efforts of Kino. Beginning with a mission at San Diego in 1769, Serra was able to plant a line of mission establishments on the main road up and down the California coast. Along an immense stretch of territory, at least 600 miles in length, the California mission system at its peak included twenty-one stations where over 21,000 Indians were engaged not only in Catholicism but also in farming, raising livestock, weaving, and related occupations. The California Franciscans reported that they had baptized thousands more, but by 1821 Mexico had declared its independence from Spain; twelve years later the missions were dissolved by the Mexican government, and Indian converts melted away.

Outnumbered by the Indians, the Roman Catholic missionaries from Spain brought their Native American converts a kind of shotgun Christianity, assisted by soldiers in garrisons never far away. But they were also sincerely convinced of a divine command to bring the Christian message to the Indians. Without the chastened perspective of a later age that would introduce a new regard for the religions of Native Americans, they thought that they were snatching the Indians from Satan—and bringing them civilization as well. For these missionaries, Roman Catholicism represented the one true religion, while European customs and manners epitomized civilization.

### French Missions

Roman Catholic efforts in New France were not dissimilar, although the French perhaps encountered even more open hostility on the part of Indian peoples than did the Spanish. The French had begun their involvement in the New World with regular visits by shipping vessels to the Newfoundland coast in the sixteenth century. By the next century they had become interested in colonization, and a French Protestant community, the Huguenots, made plans to establish an outpost in Nova Scotia. While these Protestant settlers would have their own ministers to aid them spiritually, the French government decided that Catholic priests should also go along to convert the Indians. Thus, French Franciscan missionaries entered the New World, later to be joined by Jesuit priests in Quebec.

Here, after 1625, the Jesuits strived to master Indian languages, and later they set up mission stations for the Huron Indians. But the Hurons responded

only in token numbers, and this fact combined with attacks by the Iroquois on the Hurons led to the failure of the missions. There were Jesuit martyrs in the process, among them the well-remembered Jean de Br beuf (1593-1649). Yet ironically, for political reasons the Iroquois subsequently found it necessary to conciliate the French, and by 1668 the Jesuits had taken advantage of the opportunity and opened missions in upper New York.

Work among the Iroquois lasted only about two decades until the English swept into the area, but as early as the 1630s the Jesuits had also been preaching in the Illinois country to various Ottawa peoples. Here, throughout the seventeenth century they had mission stations. St. Ignace, the largest of these, was founded in northern Michigan in 1670, while La Pointe Mission, established in 1665 in northwestern Wisconsin, later acquired fame as the place from which the Jesuit Jacques Marquette (1637-1675) set out to explore the Mississippi River with Louis Joliet. In the interim, French colonies began to encircle the missions, and there was intermarriage with the Indians and a continuing Roman Catholic influence. Meanwhile, after 1680 in what is now the state of Maine, the Jesuits followed the earlier effort by Capuchin priests and worked in missions to the Abenaki Indians.

The voyage down the Mississippi had given the French confidence to enter new territory, and where French trappers and settlers went, the missionaries followed. By the end of the century, priests were working with the Natchez people in the South, and several years later (1703) they formed a parish in what is now Mobile, Alabama. Meanwhile, with a mission near New Orleans, the Jesuits were preaching to the Arkansas, Yazoo, Choctaw, and Alibamon people. New Orleans itself became a settled French colony, and Roman Catholicism grew apace among the Europeans. Further north, a group of transplanted Acadians settled. They were French people from Nova Scotia who had refused to accept British rule there after 1755, and they brought with them to Louisiana their Roman Catholic religion and customs to be handed down to their descendants as part of Creole culture.

## English Colonies

By contrast to both the Spanish and French patterns, Roman Catholicism entered the English territories not through missions to Native Americans but through the settlement of English Catholics. When George Calvert, the first Lord Baltimore (1580-1632), acknowledged his Roman Catholicism in England, he resigned as privy councillor to King James I. Still, he did not completely lose favor with the English crown, and later King Charles I decided to grant him a charter to found a colony north of Virginia. Although George Calvert did not live to carry out his plans, his son, Cecil, received the sealed charter in his stead.

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Cecil Calvert never came to Maryland himself, but his brother, Leonard Calvert (1606-1647), arrived in 1634 as the first governor of the colony. Religious liberty was guaranteed to all in 1639 by a legal enactment and a decade later by the Act of Toleration. Catholics were a minority in the population, though, and when the Puritans gained governmental power, they repealed the Act of Toleration in 1654 and outlawed Roman Catholicism. Although Lord Baltimore later regained power, by 1688 and the Glorious Revolution in England the Catholic defeat was complete. Ironically, in the colony initially established by a Catholic, Roman Catholics began to pay taxes (1692) in support of the Church of England, and from 1718 until the outbreak of the American Revolution they were refused voting rights.

In New England, after a brief period of toleration in Rhode Island until 1664, Catholics also led a troubled existence. It was only the American Revolution that enabled them to worship freely, and by 1785 there were only perhaps 600 Catholics in New England. Similarly, beginning in 1691, New York applied religious tests to exclude Catholics from public office. Earlier, there had been a Catholic governor, Thomas Dongan (1683), but the era of toleration was short-lived. It was Pennsylvania, however, that provided the best conditions, after Maryland, for Catholic settlement. Germans and some Irish came, the Jesuits worked among them, and by 1770 there were probably 3,000 adult Catholics in Pennsylvania, while Maryland had some 10,000.

Small as the English Catholic presence was in America when compared with the missionary efforts of Spain and France, it was from the English colonies that the constitutional structure emerged within which Roman Catholicism would later flourish. Land that had been claimed by New Spain and New France would become part of the United States in the nineteenth century, and with this territory would come an assortment of Roman Catholic communities. Still more, from overseas hundreds of thousands of Catholic immigrants would pour into the country. But before we pursue the Roman Catholic saga in the United States, we need to understand something of the religion that commanded the loyalty of these Americans.

## Roman Catholic Religion

If the religion of Native Americans emphasized a consecration of space and the religion of the Jews emphasized a consecration of time, for Roman Catholics, space and time seemed equally consecrated. From the perspective of space, Catholicism expressed its religious perceptions in its sacramentalism, and from the perspective of time, it articulated its beliefs through its annual liturgical cycle. Meanwhile, the dimensions of space and time were combined in a series of popular devotions that flourished alongside the liturgy.

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### The Consecration of Space: Sacramentalism

We begin with Roman Catholic sacramentalism. A sacrament in any religion is a sacred sign—a person, a place, an object, or an action that is regarded as holy. More than that, a sacrament is a place where a divine or transcendent world is experienced as breaking into the human one. It is, in other words, a boundary phenomenon; and as the bridge that is affirmed between two worlds, a sacrament is understood to contain, in some mysterious way, the sacred power that it stands for. In a sacrament, therefore, ordinary and extraordinary reality are seen to be present, the one revealing the other even as it disguises it in ordinariness. Coming out of an understanding of the world related to the idea of correspondence, Catholic sacramentalism taught that the material world was so closely analogous to the spiritual one that it could both enclose and disclose the transcendent. Heaven was thought bound to earth by, as it were, a series of links in a chain, and, for example, even an insect was seen in some measure as a reflection of the transcendent world. Matter for Catholics was sacred; the natural world, good and holy.

Catholicism had developed its sacramental sense through the early and middle centuries of Christian history, combining a Jewish legacy with Greek philosophy and the remnants of Greco-Roman popular religion in the Mediterranean lands where Christianity spread. By medieval times, popular Christian belief held to seven sacraments, and these seven became the most concrete expression of a pervasive Catholic sacramentalism. For both medieval people and later Roman Catholics, the seven sacraments were baptism, confirmation, penance, eucharist, holy orders, matrimony, and extreme unction. Five of them formed a series of sacred actions that, ideally, assisted Catholics as they passed—again across a boundary—from one stage in life to the next. The remaining two, penance and eucharist, were meant to aid them, meanwhile, in the regular course of their lives.

Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit constituted an infant or an adult convert as a member of what Catholics called the communion of saints, the Christian community of all those now on the earth and those who had passed faithfully from this world to the next. Said to obliterate the original sin that these Christians believed was passed down from Adam and Eve, baptism was thought to purify humans and to transform them into children of God. Significantly, baptism featured the symbolic use of water. Just as water washed away the effects of natural pollution, Catholics taught, so the sacrament should cleanse the effects of spiritual stain so that humans could be fit for intimacy with God.

By the same token, confirmation used Christ, or blessed oils, to anoint a Catholic Christian as a sign of his or her spiritual maturation. Just as royal and military leaders had, for centuries, been anointed as they undertook their tasks, so—in Catholic teaching—adults in the communion of saints should be given an effective sign of their status. The bishop who administered the sacrament

gave a physical blow to the candidate in the old and traditional form of the rite—a further sign that, as an adult in the church, the confirmed (strengthened) Catholic should be prepared to witness to the faith even to the point of suffering for it. Similarly, holy orders used Christ to anoint men in a series of steps to the full Catholic priesthood. Matrimony used the spoken words of a man and a woman in a pledge of mutual faith and love to make them husband and wife, sometimes sealing their covenant with an exchange of rings. Extreme unction—in recent times called the anointing of the sick—once again used blessed oils to anoint a person in serious illness. The sacrament was meant to give to him or her the strength to regain physical health or to move successfully through the time of death.

Before the end, however, Catholics turned to penance and the eucharist for assistance along the way. Penance demanded the confession of sins and a sincere act of sorrow spoken by the penitent to a priest. Through the power given to him in his ordination, Catholics believed, the priest could then forgive the repentant sinner in the name of the Christian Trinity. Finally, in the eucharist, Catholics held that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was made physically and spiritually present to become the food of Christian believers.

Thus, all of the sacraments used material elements and human actions as vehicles through which sacred power became present for those who believed. But it was the eucharist that of all the sacraments was the center of Roman Catholic life and most clearly expressed its sacramental understanding of the world. The eucharist, which literally means "thanksgiving," was a ritual action to recall both the biblical Last Supper Jesus had eaten with his disciples and his death on the cross, in Catholic doctrine as a sacrifice for human sin. More commonly known as the Mass, the eucharist had existed from early Christian times, but throughout the Middle Ages it gradually assumed the form in which European Catholics brought it to the New World. At the heart of the ritual were the elements of bread and wine that, through a series of sacred words and actions on the part of a priest, were changed, Catholics believed, into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. They held that Jesus, present on the altar, was offered to his Father in atonement, an unbloody sacrifice that yet repeated the sacrifice of Calvary. Meanwhile, Catholics taught that the priest who offered the Mass was acting not in his own name but in the name of Jesus. Thus, for Catholics, in the Mass it was Jesus who was offering himself to his Father. Like the bread and wine, the priest was a sacramental sign, a vehicle through which the power of Jesus could act. And as in Jewish ritual, the sacred action was meant to cut through time to make people present not at a mere commemoration but at the actual event on Calvary.

While the Mass was for Catholics a sacrifice, it was also for them a sacred meal, a memorial to the last meal Jesus had eaten with his followers and a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. So it was that the bread and wine, now sacramentally the body and blood of Jesus, were consumed at the Mass by the priest, who offered the bread to other devout communicants. For the action to come full circle for Catholics, the sacramental bread and wine must be used as they were in

ordinary life. They must nourish human beings and so, Catholics taught, give spiritual grace. Again, the sacrament was seen to cut through time, so that the memorial to the Last Supper and the foretaste of paradise were not simply meant to be signaled but meant to be made real in the lives of participants.

Sacramentalism did not end with the seven sacraments. Rather, it was a pervasive means of conceiving of the church, human life, and even the natural world. In the Catholic scheme of things, the church ideally should be as broad as the human race. In practice, it should include all those born into a territory, a people, a culture. Unlike a sect or denomination, which drew boundary lines between its membership and the world at large, the church sought to include all, both saints and sinners. For Catholicism, the church was the sign of God's presence in the world; it was one, holy, universal (catholic), and apostolic, and from the sacramental perspective the sign of God really was God present among humans.

Similarly, the pope of Rome was for Catholics the sign of the church, representing it to God and, at the same time, acting as the conduit through whom God communicated with human beings. Hence, the pope was considered the vicar, or representative, of Jesus Christ, and his solemn and official teachings were popularly regarded as infallible for many centuries. (They were officially so declared by a church council in 1870.) In Catholic understanding, the Roman papacy, with its traditions and trappings, stood equal to the Bible as a source of spiritual authority. Like a new Israel, Rome was seen as the specific human location where God had chosen to communicate with human beings. This was why the church was Roman Catholic, and this was why it was also authoritarian.

Finally, at the apex of this structure was Jesus, for Catholics the sign and sacrament of God revealed both in the scripture and in the continuing tradition of the church. In the Catholic view, by taking human flesh Jesus had spoken the clearest word about the goodness of the natural world and the sacredness of matter. If God had, for Catholics, become human in Jesus, then humanness—existence in *this* world—had its worth and value. The church taught that value, and so Roman Catholicism had a thisworldly as well as otherworldly orientation. Indeed, Catholic tradition put spirit and matter together by understanding the church as the Mystical Body of Christ. Likewise, monks and nuns, as members of religious orders that vowed poverty, chastity, and obedience, were thought of theologically as material signs of Jesus in the world and of his kingdom to come. True, monks and nuns were doing as Catholics believed all people would in paradise, neither marrying nor giving in marriage (Matt. 22:30). Yet, Catholics said, they shared basic joys of living: they ate, drank, and worked for and in the church. Hence, in Catholic thought they were witnesses to the messianic age, which although hidden, was already breaking upon the world.

Alongside this major sacramental scheme, Catholicism recognized a more mundane sacramentalism. Any natural object could become a "sacramental," an article in and through which, Catholics believed, humans could encounter the grace of God. Thus, a priest could bless water to make it holy, and he could

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confer a blessing, too, on a religious painting or statue. People could wear commemorative medals dedicated to Jesus, his mother, Mary, or one of the saints. They could light candles as signs of their prayerful remembrance of a loved one, receive ashes on Ash Wednesday to remind them that they would one day return to the dust, cherish rosary beads as talismans of the Virgin Mary's protection, and acquire and venerate relics of the saints.

### The Consecration of Time: The Liturgical Cycle

Just as sacramentalism expressed the Catholic consecration of space, the liturgical cycle expressed its consecration of time. Structured very much like the Jewish annual cycle of feasts and fasts, the Catholic year began with the Advent season, which occurred during the month of December. At this time, believers awaited anew the coming of Jesus Christ. Then on Christmas day Roman Catholics commemorated his historical birth into the world as well as his spiritual birth in human hearts. The season that followed was punctuated with feasts that recalled events recorded in the gospels: the remembrance of the "holy innocents," infants slain by the king, Herod, in his angry search for Jesus; the Epiphany, in which the Magi, or wise men, paid homage at the crib of Jesus in Bethlehem; and the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist at the Jordan River. Then, as winter drew to a close, Catholics kept a forty-day period of prayer and fasting called Lent. It recalled the forty days that, in gospel accounts, Jesus had spent in the desert before beginning his public ministry, and it culminated in the observances of Holy Week to commemorate the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Beginning on the Sunday before Easter, known as Palm Sunday, Catholics relived the biblical account of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem before his passion and death. They received blessed palms and formed in procession around the church, singing "Hosanna to the son of David" (Matt. 21:9), as had the Jews of old. In the early part of the week, scriptural texts read at each daily Mass told of Jesus's words and deeds during the last days preceding his arrest. Then, on Maundy or Holy Thursday (believed to be originally the same day as the Jewish Passover), Catholics commemorated in a special way the Last Supper and the institution of the eucharist. This was the day on which the oils to be used ritually during the coming year were blessed, and this was also the day on which the priest who said Mass washed the feet of laypeople, a re-creation of the action in which, in the gospel, Jesus had washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper (John 13:4-5). For devout Catholics joy and sadness mingled in the liturgy: Jesus was giving the lasting gift of himself in what appeared to be bread and wine; yet Jesus was also about to go to his death for the sins of humankind. As Catholics recalled their Jewish heritage, he was the paschal Lamb to be sacrificed so that his people could pass over from slavery in sin to freedom in grace.

Good Friday was the only day of the year on which Roman Catholics, properly speaking, could not be present at Mass. There was a service that resembled the eucharistic action of the Mass, but unlike any other day the priest did

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not consecrate bread and wine. Instead, there was a communion service using the reserved sacrament, kept on a side altar after the Holy Thursday Mass. Since Good Friday was the day on which the death of Jesus was memorialized, Catholics felt that it was fitting that they should be without the sacramental action. A sense of sorrow and loss pervaded the scriptural texts of the liturgy, everything serving to underline the significance of what was being commemorated.

But the most sacred day of the church year for Catholics was Easter, and the liturgy used every means available to make the point. A long vigil service the previous evening ended with a Mass at midnight to honor the resurrection of Jesus. The vigil had been filled with the symbolism of new birth and new life: the lighting of a new fire from flint; the blessing of a huge new Easter candle, representing Jesus, which would stand in the sanctuary during the Easter season; the blessing of baptismal water for the succeeding year; and the solemn repetition by the congregation of baptismal vows. In the Mass that followed, the scriptural texts were sprinkled with alleluias: they expressed Catholic joy in the belief that Christ has risen and was still with his people.

Then, forty days after Easter, Catholics celebrated the feast of the ascension of Jesus into heaven, where, they believed, he sat at his Father's right hand, reigning with him in his kingdom. Ten days later, just as the Jews recalled the giving of the Torah (*Shawon*, Pentecost), Catholics kept the feast of Pentecost. For them, however, it was a commemoration of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. In the biblical account, tongues of fire descended on the apostles as they were waiting in an upper room, the fire transforming them with courage and zeal to spread the message of the gospel, the tongues enabling others to understand them, although they could not speak the language of the apostles.

The remainder of the liturgical year was a long series of Sundays after Pentecost, spread through the summer and autumn months, during which successive aspects of the life and teachings of Jesus were considered. Interspersed throughout this period, as through other parts of the year, were major feasts commemorating Jesus, Mary, or the saints. Almost no day in the Roman Catholic year was without its special liturgy, with scriptural texts read at the Mass to bring its lesson home. If a so-called *ferial* (or, literally, "free") day did occur, the priest used scriptural texts from the Mass of the preceding Sunday, always performing the eucharistic action to consecrate bread and wine.

As in the Jewish calendar, the feasts of the Catholic year were historicized rituals, remembering the traditional events that formed the story of Christian beginnings or the men and women who were its heroes. Still, as in the Jewish liturgy, underneath the symbolism of history lay the symbolism of nature and the material world. Roman Catholics awaited the birth of Christ, for them the light of the world, as the year lay "dying" on the last days before winter solstice. In the Christmas feast, Jesus was presented as if born during the week of solstice, like the first ray of the sun that, ancient religions taught, had conquered the winter darkness at that time. Lent brought a season of fasting during the last days of winter, while Easter came on the Sunday following the first full moon after the

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vernal (spring) equinox. It was the Catholic feast of new life, held when new life was rising in nature. Appropriately, Catholic customs in many lands included use of Easter eggs, natural symbols of fertility and birth.

#### Paraliturgical Devotions

In addition to the official liturgy, Catholics could participate in a multitude of paraliturgical devotions (literally, devotions alongside the liturgy) that combined sacramental space and consecrated time. Each Catholic country had its own favorite among them; and in America, therefore, popular devotionism flourished with imported practices from many lands. These devotions were special, personal ways for Catholics to worship Jesus, venerate Mary, or honor the saints.

Among special devotions to Jesus, the cultus of the Sacred Heart was perhaps the most widespread among American Catholics. Originating in France with the recorded experiences of the nun Margaret Mary Alacoque, who in 1675 claimed a number of times to have seen Jesus, the devotion stressed the love and suffering of Christ. Its iconography included the portrayal of the bleeding and pierced heart of Jesus surrounded by a crown of thorns, often fashioned as a badge that a person could pin to inner or outer clothing. By the middle of the nineteenth century, an official feast honored the Sacred Heart, and meanwhile devout Catholics tried to attend Mass and receive communion on the first Friday of nine successive months. They believed that a promise had been made by Jesus to Margaret Mary Alacoque: if they kept the nine first Fridays, they would not die in a state of serious personal sin, and their salvation would be assured.

Other devotions to Jesus included special worship of the reserved sacrament at a time called Forty Hours, to commemorate the time that, according to tradition, Jesus spent in the tomb before his resurrection. In a period of that length, the communion bread, a small circular wafer, was exposed to public view in a special sacred vessel. There was also Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, when, in a brief ceremony, the priest raised the sacrament in the same vessel to bless the assembled congregation, making the sign of the cross over them with it. Additionally, there were fourteen Stations of the Cross, usually representations in raised relief along the walls of the church. "Making the Stations" meant moving from station to station, following Jesus, as it were, in meditation along the road to Calvary. Still other Catholics had devotion to the Infant of Prague (*Czechoslovakia*), a doll-like statue dressed in bejeweled satin with a crown on its head, a representation of the kingship of Jesus even in the child.

Devotion to Mary was even more widespread than paraliturgical devotion to Jesus. In the rosary, Catholics used a chain of beads on which, while repeating prayers to God as Father and to Mary, they recalled traditional beliefs about the mysteries of her life as an inspiration for their own. In use since late medieval times, the rosary was also honored in a feast on October 7. Other Catholics expressed their devotion to Mary by wearing the scapular, two small pieces of brown wool cloth worn over the shoulders as a symbolic undergarment. No one,

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Catholicism was also and ultimately a social ethic. It dealt with the waging of war and the keeping of peace, with the problem of poverty and the distribution of goods, with the relationship between the church and its claims, on the one hand, and the state and its demands, on the other. In medieval times, Catholicism had existed as Christendom, a public and cultural reality that included both church and state. In the modern era, it still sought to adjudicate the proper roles of church and state, more sensitive perhaps than many to the implications of church-state separation in America. In short, salvation, for Catholics, came to a community, and individuals had to find their place in this communal scheme of things. Nineteenth-century and later popes were particularly strong in pointing to what this meant in terms of capital and labor in an industrialized society, but the message of community and social concern was part of the traditional heritage of Roman Catholicism.

### The American Saga of Catholicism

Keeping in mind this traditional heritage, we turn now to the American saga of Catholicism. We need to explore the direction of the changes that the American experience brought, changes that, as we will see, came from both inside and outside the church. Briefly, these changes were brought about by the ethnicity of the American Catholic church and by the pluralism of its setting. Ethnicity refers to the internal condition of being one church among many denominations; pluralism, to the external condition of being one church among many denominations. Together, the two conditions were aspects of one issue, that of how Roman Catholics should respond to their new American situation. And together, the two conditions generated a tension that in microcosm reflected the larger tension between oneness and manyness characteristic of American society.

#### Ethnicity

Ethnicity became an important coefficient in the American Catholic experience as the nation expanded into new territory and waves of immigrants poured in. Each ethnic group had evolved its own mix of ordinary and extraordinary religion when in its traditional setting; it combined local custom and ethos with general Roman Catholic teaching. There would be organizational problems as worshippers from different European nations tried to share communion plate and pew. Still more, there would be conflict about whose way of being Catholic was right. Both Roman Catholics and their American observers generally wanted to see a single church that could be easily understood and explained. This meant that one or another ethnic group within the church was likely to impart its flavor to the whole. As we will see, this is what happened in Irish ascendancy over American Roman Catholicism.

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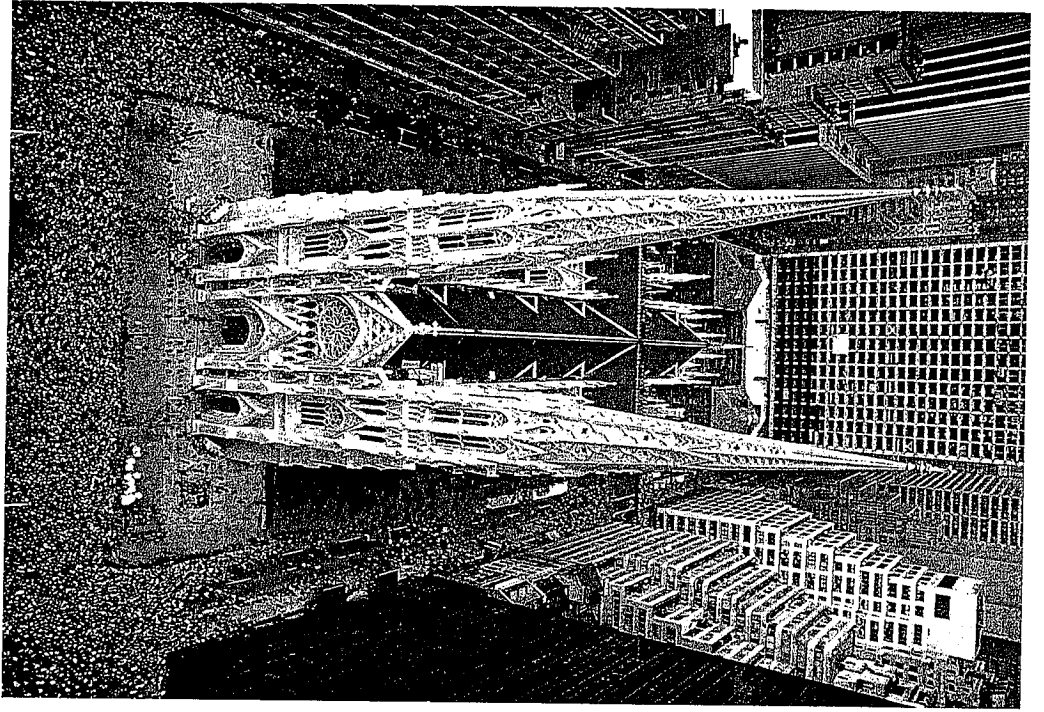
We have already noticed that the earliest Catholics in the lands that later became the United States were Spanish, French, Native American, and English. Moreover, in colonial times Pennsylvania's Catholics had been mostly German, whereas New England had been the home of a small number of Irish Catholics. From the beginning, there was friction among these nationalities in the church. Different cultures and customs frequently led to different points of view and different practical stands on a series of issues, so that ethnic differences became part of larger misunderstandings. Thus, in Louisiana, French and Spanish Catholics had been hostile toward each other until the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 stirred them to join ranks against their common Anglo-American enemy. By the early nineteenth century, too, newly appointed French bishops were experiencing conflict with the Irish. Still earlier, in the late eighteenth century, Germans had expressed their hostility toward an Anglo-Catholic leadership by the formation of a separate Holy Trinity Church in Philadelphia (1787).

But the most serious ethnic struggles occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century when Irish immigrants became the backbone of American Catholicism and other groups fought to maintain their identity as nationalities within the church. The Irish, mostly poor cottiers caught in the potato famine of Ireland, arrived in the 1840s and thereafter in huge numbers; they were bereft of resources and were forced to settle in eastern urban slums. Although their knowledge of the English language helped the Irish to adjust, their lack of literacy and working skills combined with their poverty to hamper them. Because their clergy had helped them in Ireland during the potato famine and also because their clergy had enough education to become cultural brokers in the new and alien setting, the American Irish remained loyal to their religious leaders. It was true that, just as in Ireland, many were attached to the church by little more than baptism. Still, the many who were practicing Catholics marked their religious observance with a distinctive style. Their Catholicism tended toward legalism and literal observance of church law, at the same time emphasizing personal morality and individualistic piety. Often antimaterial, the Irish encouraged their sons and daughters to serve the church as priests and nuns.

Thus, it was Irish Catholics who, by the sheer power of their numbers—almost 1 million by 1850—and by their willingness to enter ecclesiastical service, came to dominate the hierarchy of the American church. Moreover, when the Catholic leadership called for the development of a separate parochial school system, it was Irish nuns who for the most part staffed it, enabling them to pass on to generations of Roman Catholic schoolchildren their interpretation of Catholicism. Irish brick and mortar built the church—hence the “mortar” of the “bread and mortar” in this chapter's title. In the middle of the twentieth century, it was still the Irish who were giving American Catholicism its public face. Indeed, the Irish were to Catholicism what mainstream Protestants would be to other religious peoples in America—the dominant one among the many.

Of considerable significance among the Catholic many with whom the Irish dealt were the Germans. Present, as we have seen, from colonial times, they

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St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York City. Constructed beginning in 1858, Gothic-style St. Patrick's Cathedral was a proud announcement of Roman Catholic—and Irish—presence in America. The sign on the center-rear building, for the papal visit of 1979, reads "Hardhats welcome the pope."

increased their numbers through immigration after the War of 1812 and steadily expanded until 1855. Indeed, by 1850 there were over 500,000 Germans in the United States. Generally more affluent and better educated than the Irish and other Catholic groups, they often left their eastern ports of entry and headed for the Midwest. Here their settlements spread out in the cities and farmland that described a triangle between Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Milwaukee. The Germans were deeply attached to their language and traditions, wanting them to be used in their churches and schools. Hence, they demanded parishes organized on the basis of nationality rather than territory. With their love of their native music, relaxed observance of the Sabbath, and opposition to the temperance movement, they were often at odds, especially, with the attitudes of the Irish.

From 1855 German Catholics established the Central Verein, a strong organization that continued into the twentieth century. Then in 1871 Peter Paul Cahensly (1838–1923), a businessman in Nassau (Germany), organized the St. Raphaelverein as a society to aid German immigrants to the New World. In 1891 the society presented a petition to the pope, claiming that immigrants were being lost to Catholicism in huge numbers because they lacked priests and institutions of their own nationality to minister to them. The American church "should be multilingual and multinational if it was to succeed," they said. "Catholicism," as it came to be called, exaggerated the defections from the American church and brought support from Germans in Europe to the struggle in America against the Irish. Although the movement finally failed in its most ambitious goals, it was a strong indicator of the continuing conflict within American Catholicism.

In the last third of the nineteenth century, however, the immigrant tensions that had begun in an earlier age were complicated by the arrival of new groups. The "new immigration" from 1880 until the First World War brought a steady flow of Southern and Eastern European Catholics. Well over 3 million Italians arrived by 1920 and, among a variety of Eastern European national groups, nearly as many Poles. Yet for various reasons neither ethnic group seriously altered the public face of American Roman Catholicism.

The Italians came mostly from southern Italy and Sicily, poor and illiterate for the most part, and, like the Irish before them, settling in eastern seacoast cities. For the Italians, perhaps more than for most other immigrant groups, religion and culture were interfused, always returning to their source and center in the extended family. This preference for familial over ecclesiastical identification had only been magnified by the recent history of church-state relations in Italy. The pope had been the temporal ruler of the northern Italian Papal States until 1870, and so Italian Catholics had come to extend to the official church the same kind of distrust they felt toward political government. As they immigrated to America, these Italian Catholics were unwilling to give the church either their children, as priests and nuns, or their money, to supply the brick and mortar for new shrines and schools. With their own spirit of relaxed adherence to official rules and regulations, they did not accept the legalism of the Irish.

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By contrast, the Poles were intensely devoted to the institutional church. Coming from peasant backgrounds, many who immigrated to America eventually became farmers, but numbers of them settled in cities like Chicago, Milwaukee, Detroit, and Cleveland. For centuries, the Polish people had joined their nationalism to their religion, and so in America, like the Germans, they sought to maintain a distinct national ethos, preserving their language in churches and schools. To some extent, the pattern of conflict was repeated: there were struggles between clergy and laity in different parishes over financial matters, and by the early twentieth century, there was a movement for equal representation with other national groups in the American hierarchy. Indeed, tensions with a non-Polish hierarchy resulted in the formation in Scranton, Pennsylvania, of the separate Polish National Catholic Church in 1904.

Still, most Polish Catholics chose to remain within the Roman Catholic church. And since history was by this time on the side of continued Irish hegemony, the real aim of Polish Catholics was survival more than dominance. The results of their efforts could be measured by the fact that as late as 1950 there were still 800 Polish parishes in the United States. Beyond this, the Polish brought into the American church a series of new devotions, such as that to the Black Madonna (the Virgin) of Czestochowa, and they gave to the church their sons and daughters in Polish Catholic religious communities.

More recently in the twentieth century, Roman Catholic immigration expanded still again. According to U.S. Bureau of the Census figures reported in 1985, there were 16.9 million people of Spanish origin in the nation. This figure represented a decided increase since 1960, when people with Spanish surnames numbered only 3.5 million. Moreover, official figures did not include the many (estimated variously from 3 million to 10 million) who had entered the country without immigration papers. Changes in the U.S. immigration law in 1965 made entry from Central and South America easier, and political and economic conditions in the various countries of origin often also prompted a decision to leave.

Thus through the arrival of large numbers of Spanish-speaking people, Spanish Catholicism, the earliest European Christianity in America, reappeared in new form. Overwhelmingly, however, this great influx, despite their Catholic heritage, were also the least church oriented of any immigrant group. A swelling Mexican presence had begun in the early twentieth century, spilling over the borders into Texas, California, and the Southwest. Later, by midcentury, Puerto Ricans were entering New York City in heavy concentrations, while the Cuban revolution of 1959 brought Cubans in large numbers to the Miami area, and a record number of Haitians arrived in the country, too. Hispanic Catholics tended to be antieretical, and, in the United States as in their homelands, many turned from their nominal Catholicism to an intense and active pentecostalism. Still, their liturgies were distinctive, and in their absorption of Catholicism, like the Italians, they displayed strong overlapping between ordinary and extraordinary religion. In their closely knit subcultures, community was not theoretical but lived; organized religion became culture, as the extraordinary elements in

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Catholicism merged into ordinariness. So for many years the composition of "public Catholicism" went largely unaltered, not affected one way or another by Hispanics who felt no need to get involved in the official church.

On the other hand, by the late twentieth century the composition of public Catholicism *did* begin to alter because of the Hispanic presence. Hispanics were now some 25 percent of the United States Catholic population, and, whereas in 1972 there had been but one Hispanic bishop in the nation, in 1985 there were eighteen. There was also a national secretariat for Hispanic affairs in Washington, D.C., and six regional offices were scattered throughout the country. Even earlier, by the late sixties in Los Angeles, the militant Catholics *por la Raza* (Catholics for the People) had protested the opulence of the church and its seeming indifference toward the political and social struggles of Hispanic peoples. Other Hispanic groups of priests and nuns organized around themes of social justice and empowerment for Hispanic Catholics. Then, in 1971, the first *encuentro*, or national pastoral congress, took place in Washington, D.C. Later *encuentros* were held in 1977 and 1985, addressing the needs and concerns of Hispanic Catholics. Large numbers of laypeople attended, many of them delegates from a grass-roots movement that had by now sprung up. Hispanic bishops, by 1983, characterized the changes as the unfolding of a "new era."

Meanwhile, new Catholic immigrants from Vietnam and elsewhere in Asia added to the changing population of the church. Significantly, too, the small number of African-Americans who were Catholics had shown a sizable increase. In 1985, some 1.2 million, or 5 percent, of the American black community counted themselves as Catholics. Twenty-five years earlier the number had stood at 3 percent. By 1985, also, there were ten African-American Catholic bishops, and the number of priests who were African-American had risen to 350. More indicative than numbers, though, was a new climate. The "black power" movement of the late sixties had been transmuted, so that by 1984 the African-American bishops could write a pastoral letter pointing to the richness of black culture and proclaiming the need to share their experience with others. In this mood, the bishops asked increased leadership authority for black Roman Catholics and called for an end to the racism that had long existed in the Catholic church. Even so, blacks as a people were decisively Protestant, and we will look more closely at African-American religion in Chapter 6.

The black celebration of ethnicity, however, did not go unnoticed by the ethnic groups that had immigrated in years past. Indeed, African-American ethnic consciousness no doubt suggested to some other Roman Catholics their cultural mood in the seventies and eighties, in what the Slovak-American Catholic Michael Novak has called the "rise of the unmeltable ethnic." These ethnic Catholics were drawn to a nostalgic recollection of their past. Being part of the silent majority of the American middle class had proved for them, as it had for other groups, in some ways unrewarding. At the same time, the ethnic organization among blacks (as well as among Indians and Hispanics) urged them toward greater visibility. The many, we might say, interacted with forms of manyness

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other than their own, so that there was a sustained regard for ethnicity in the American Catholic church. Although the Irish continued to predominate, the age of the monolith simply had not come.

### *Pluralism and Americanization in Historical Perspective*

It is the place here to consider the second major factor that affected the course of Roman Catholicism in the United States—its pluralistic setting. This external condition meant that, both for outsiders and insiders, no matter what its theological claims to universality, the Catholic church in America was a minority. For outsiders, the Catholic presence was a sometime threatening quantity, and Protestant fears generated a series of nativist and protectionist movements. For insiders, emulation of the American and Protestant mainstream led to a series of attempts by some to “de-Romanize” the church, while others more conservatively sought a retreat into separateness. For these people, the preservation of their ethnic heritages became a way of avoiding the mainstream. Hence, as we have noticed, pluralism and ethnicity were related issues.

We will examine the question of nativism in more detail in the last chapter. Here, however, it is important to note that nativism was a continuing fact of Catholic life throughout much of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. By 1830 an anti-Catholic weekly called *The Protestant* had been established to counter Roman corruption, and the crusade against Catholicism had begun.

In 1834, in an often-cited incident, a mob set fire to the Ursuline convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts, while in Philadelphia a decade later at least two churches were burned. Meanwhile, associations were formed in order to combat what many Americans saw as the dangers in Catholicism. In 1842 there was the American Protestant Association, and in 1854, the Know-Nothing party. Later, in 1887, the American Protective Association was formed to oppose Catholicism, and then in the 1920s the revived Ku Klux Klan fought against the Catholic church. Fueled by fears inspired by the “otherness” of the assorted “papist” immigrants, these organizations expressed sentiments that were shared by many who did not belong to them. They were monuments to the strains that Protestant America was experiencing as it worked to come to terms with massive immigration.

For some Catholic insiders, nativist harassment was met by a strong desire for retreat and segregation. Hostile toward Anglo-America, many working-class immigrants of German and Polish origins joined the majority of the Irish and their clergy in a strong conservative stance. Led among the hierarchy by Michael A. Corrigan (1839–1902), the archbishop of New York, and Bernard McQuaid (1823–1909), the bishop of Rochester, in the late nineteenth century they labored to isolate the church from the dominance of a Protestant culture. They were especially fearful of the public schools, where, they thought, a kind of common-denominator Protestantism was being promulgated. It was in this atmosphere of caution and reserve that the Catholic school system was born, with

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the demand by the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore (1884) that every parish establish its own parochial school.

For other Catholic insiders, however, mainstream American culture had an inviting face. Even at the beginning of the early national period, some lay Catholics, in the absence of a prohibition by Bishop John Carroll (1735–1815), had taken a strong hand in parish affairs. Influenced by congregational Protestants, they were often close to calling and replacing their own pastors, sometimes even becoming schismatic by doing so. Trusteeism, as it was called, took advantage of the fact that the civil law had been written to accommodate both church–state separation and Protestant church polity, conferring corporate ownership of church property on the lay trustees of a congregation. Heightened sometimes by struggles between various national groups within the church, trusteeism was a recurring problem for bishops for some sixty years. Trustees invoked their democratic rights, and the old hierarchical and sacramental model was challenged by the new order. Eventually, property rights were vested in the bishop of each diocese as a corporation sole, but not before there had been much disruption of traditional patterns.

The democratic trustees were succeeded in the latter part of the nineteenth century by democratic bishops, who formed a liberal camp in opposition to the conservatives we have already encountered. Led by James Cardinal Gibbons (1834–1921) of Baltimore and even more aggressively by Archbishop John Ireland (1838–1918) of St. Paul, Minnesota, a number of these bishops sought to open Catholic culture outward toward America. They wanted to end every kind of Catholic isolation and to “Americanize” the church. Catholics, they thought, should wholeheartedly embrace the American style and the American way of doing things.

Thus, Cardinal Gibbons actively intervened in 1887 to prevent Rome from condemning the Knights of Labor, an early labor organization supported by Irish Catholics. With the strong endorsement of Cardinal Gibbons and Archbishop Ireland, Bishop John Lancaster Spalding (1840–1916) of Peoria, Illinois, crusaded for the foundation of a Catholic university where graduate theological study could go on. His success was apparent in 1889 when the Catholic University of America opened its doors in the nation’s capital. Meanwhile, Archbishop Ireland remained dubious concerning the value of a separate parochial school system and repeatedly urged the American church to live in its own age and its own setting. For Ireland, the Roman Catholic church in America should become an American Catholic church. As he and other liberals saw it, the official separation between church and state in the United States was not just a practical arrangement under which Roman Catholicism had managed to thrive. Rather, it was an ideal situation and one that American Roman Catholics should enthusiastically support.

But the liberals did not continue their efforts toward the Americanization of the church with impunity. Matters came to a head in 1899 when Pope Leo XIII published an encyclical letter, *Trazen Benevolentiae*, which condemned a number

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of opinions collectively labeled "Americanism." A key example of this Americanism for the pope was the willingness to regard natural virtues more highly than supernatural ones. Here, natural virtues meant active and "thisworldly" gifts that were congenial to the Protestant American style. Supernatural virtues meant those that were more "passive" and otherworldly in character, like the traditional humility and obedience that were associated with Catholic saints. A second instance of Americanism was the willingness to adapt to the theories and methods of modern popular culture, seen as bringing a relaxation of the ancient rigor of the church. A third instance was a tendency toward individualism in religion, whereas traditional Catholicism had stressed the role of the church in salvation.

Americanism has often been called the "phantom heresy," because as soon as the encyclical letter was published, American bishops unanimously asserted their freedom from the errors named therein. They were not Americanists, the suspected liberal bishops said, nor did they know any Americanists. Pope Leo XIII had effectively put an end to the Americanization of the Catholic church—at least for the time being.

Meanwhile, on the popular level, the second half of the nineteenth century brought to the fore an institution imported from Europe that at the same time fit closely with American Protestant spirituality. The Catholic mission movement gave to the church its own brand of revivalism, helping to stop defections and to excite the piety of ordinary working-class people. Held in a parish, usually for one to two weeks every four or five years, a mission featured traveling preachers whose sermons were designed to stir up fear of eternal punishment, sorrow for what was acknowledged as sin, and recommitment to Roman Catholicism. Like Protestant revivals, missions used mass evangelistic techniques to reach their audiences, the preachers planting a mission cross, preaching with an empty casket to dramatize a point, or tolling a sinner's bell at evening.

Each mission aimed in the context of Catholic sacramentalism at individual conversion or rededication. For the Catholic who came to listen, the sermon was meant to lead to the confessional, where, in Catholic belief, sins were to be forgiven. It was a fact that after the Catholic Counter-Reformation of the sixteenth century, Catholic piety had entered an evangelical and individualistic era. Still, it seemed a fair assessment that the presence of American Protestantism in a general way supported the pattern of Catholic revivalism. Traveling preachers, the use of self-conscious techniques, an emphasis on conversion and stern morality, the preference for emotion over intellect, a pervading individualism—the mission movement shared all of these with Protestant revivalism.

### *Pluralism and Americanization: The Later Twentieth Century*

In the twentieth century, it remained for Rome itself to unleash the forces that would stimulate a new era of Americanization for the church. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)—a meeting in Rome of all the bishops of the church

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with the pope at their head—did not so much cause the changes as catalyze them by discarding older forms and admitting new ones. Already, in the fifties, American Catholics had begun to come of age. They were reaching social and economic equality with their Protestant neighbors, and so they were more and more thinking and acting like members of the mainstream. When Vatican II used the work of the American Jesuit priest John Courtney Murray (1904-1967) in its official Declaration on Religious Freedom, it was offering an endorsement of the American way. Although they were no longer alive to savor the fact, the nineteenth-century liberals, the Americanists who thought that church-state separation was an ideal and not just a necessity, had come into their own. The American Catholic experience with religious pluralism, with the manyness of free and individual choices, had helped to shape the teaching of the world church.

Just as significantly, in the wake of Vatican II American Catholicism registered changes in the area of worship and in the area of morality. The results of a long and scholarly liturgical movement were visible when the council paved the way for Mass texts in the language of each nation instead of the traditional Latin. Many accretions to the Mass that had grown up over the years were cut away, while scriptural sermons and congregational singing were stressed. Although the justification for these changes was that they brought the liturgy closer to the pattern of the early church, in fact the changes underlined the verbal content of the service at the expense of the symbolic. In so doing, the changes did not destroy sacramentalism, but they did modify it. The reformed liturgy came closer to the model of Protestant services, a model that we will regard more closely in the next chapter.

At the same time, sociological study suggested that Sunday Mass attendance—always high because failure to attend was considered a serious sin—had declined in the United States. By the early eighties, it had increased only slightly again, and the paraliturgical devotionality of the past seemed permanently challenged and eroded by the reforms. Once more, Catholics were coming closer in their religious practices and attitudes to their Protestant neighbors.

Beginning in the later sixties as well, a charismatic movement swept the church. In some measure it was a twentieth-century successor to the old nineteenth-century mission revivalism. Yet it went further. Attracting a well-educated middle class that included many clergy, it preferred experience to theology and actively cultivated ecumenical relationships with American pentecostals. The movement stressed the pentecostal baptism of the Holy Spirit, which was thought to bring gifts of prophecy, exorcism, healing, and speaking in tongues. Charismatic religious rhetoric was often borrowed from pentecostals, and so, too, were characteristic gestures such as the raising of hands at prayer and the laying on of hands for healing.

Charismatics often met in private homes during evening hours to conduct their prayer sessions, but they did begin to organize, establishing a Center for Communication and Service in 1969 and sponsoring a Conference on Charismatic

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Renewal in Rome in 1975. Annual conventions, usually held at the University of Notre Dame, became huge affairs that used the university's football stadium and basketball arena to accommodate the crowds gathered for Mass. By 1984 perhaps 500,000 Catholics were involved in the charismatic movement, with approximately half of them attending weekly prayer meetings. Not only did prayer groups flourish (some 5,700 of them), but there were also about 100 covenant communities organized more intensely in a pooling of financial resources and decision making. In recent times growth has been slower, and, of course, not all Catholics attracted to the charismatic movement have remained a part of it. But as some ceased participation, new individuals were drawn to charismatic Catholicism, so that the number who have at one time or another been involved is well into the millions. (One 1984 estimate suggested 8 million to 10 million since 1967.) At the end of the eighties, it was clear that the charismatic movement in the Roman Catholic church to stay. And while the bishops had sometimes regarded charismatics nervously because of fear of heresy, they had, in 1969, cautiously approved the movement. They felt that they needed the zeal of charismatic Catholics at a time when the American church seemed lax.

If there seemed to be laxity—or a different spirit abroad in the church after Vatican II—it was nowhere more suggested than in the area of morality and ethics. Overall, individualism in morality grew at the expense of priority for community. This was evident in a more permissive sexual ethic, which sociological surveys discovered especially among young Roman Catholics. There was more willingness to condone sexual activity outside of marriage and more support for artificial birth control and even abortion. Again, the data suggested that Catholics resembled their Protestant neighbors more closely in the area of sexual morality than they ever had previously. Implicit in the changes was a move from a sense of absolutes based on belief in natural and revealed law for a community and a turning toward the situational and the relative. Catholics were moving to an ethic based on history, and the move led them closer to Protestant America.

Meanwhile, individualism was apparent as more and more priests and nuns sought dispensations from their vows to return to lay life. Other priests and nuns in the democratic and collegial spirit fostered by Vatican II demanded greater responsibility in the government of their institutions, while some priests also demanded the right to marry. Similarly, the laity, with church encouragement voicing concern for the management of their parishes, formed councils to assist their priests. While the parishes did not return to nineteenth-century trusteeship, the American democratic model was not difficult to find.

Nor were democracy and an egalitarian spirit hard to find among Catholic women. With a rising feminist consciousness, many came to question the hierarchical stance of their church, seeing it as patriarchal and oppressive to women. Feminist theologians such as Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza led the new morality of resistance and reform from one direction, as did other, more loosely affiliated laywomen from another. By the late eighties—in

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organizations as diverse as the Institute in Culture and Creation Spirituality, in Oakland, California, and Grailville, in Loveland, Ohio—a broad Catholic feminism had come to mean joining with others who were not Catholic in a movement called ecofeminism. Here environmental activism joined forces with feminism in concern for the earth as Gaia, a living (female) being undergoing a time of purification because of human environmental abuse. Moreover, feminist Catholic women joined with some others who were not Catholic in spontaneous movements like WomenChurch, with its own feminist and earth-based liturgies. There was a mood of experimentation and moral assertiveness in the air, and in this atmosphere some women continued to press their case to be Catholic priests.

The radical, prophetic mood of earth spirituality and female priesthood was an indicator of a final way in which Catholic morality had grown, more Protestant and more American. A prophet in the history of religions was a figure who criticized the existing state of things, striving to purify it of perceived corruption and to restore what the prophet saw as fundamental truth. Such a figure stood outside the religious situation in its contemporary form, impelled by a different vision of what ought to be. With this message of criticism, a prophet diverged sharply in character from a priest, whose role was to uphold the standing order by repeating its rituals. Every religion has had something of the prophet and something of the priest in its history, but in the modern West it was certain forms of Protestantism that most strongly cherished the figure of the prophet and Catholicism, by contrast, that most clearly chose the conserving role of the priest. As we will see in the next chapter and in Chapter II, American Protestantism with its Puritan roots often preached a prophetic morality. On the other hand, Catholicism in its traditional form usually preferred priestly action.

Catholic feminism were, in this context, prophets. But there were other American Catholic prophets, many of them connected with the peace movement. So, for example, the Berrigan brothers, Daniel (b. 1921) and Philip (b. 1923), Roman Catholic priests, led their followers in protest against the Vietnam War, willing to go to jail for their words and deeds. The Berrigans spoke and marched, raided draft headquarters, poured animal blood on records, and inspired dozens of others to behave in kind. Still more, by 1983 even the mood of the Catholic bishops had turned prophetic. In a pastoral letter, "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response," the bishops raised serious questions about war in a nuclear age and became advocates for peace.

Catholic life values informed the left-leaning words and acts of the Berrigans and the bishops. And it was Catholic life values, too, that figured in the complex of motives prompting a militant group of Roman Catholic prophets of the right. In the seventies and eighties, the prolife movement, which included many Catholics, led an antiabortion campaign that escalated from impassioned speeches and the display of enlarged fetal pictures to marches, protests, and sometimes even physical harassment of the clinics where abortions were performed and of the women who chose to undergo them. The antiabortionists resembled the Prohibitionists of an earlier era in the fierceness of their stand and

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the aggressiveness with which they worked to change laws to reflect their views. Indeed, it was the 1973 Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*, which held that women had a constitutional right to abortion in the early stages of a pregnancy, that galvanized many into action. And in the 1989 Supreme Court decision in *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, a case involving a Missouri statute to discourage abortions, proflters claimed a partial victory. Here, however, the point is less the politics of proflters than what they shared with Catholics of profoundly different views. (In fact, polls show that large numbers of Catholics support abortions, especially in certain situations like rape or a threat to the woman's life.) The point is that both Catholics of the left—like feminists, the Berrigans, and to some extent the bishops—and Catholics of the right—like the proflters—preached and defended traditional life values in a prophetic stance that was new. But the stance of prophecy had more to do with the context of Protestant America than with anything in recent Roman Catholic history.

The last third of the twentieth century saw a Catholicism that had changed remarkably from its small beginnings in America. By the eighties, one-quarter or more of the population was Roman Catholic, but there had been a decline in devotional practice for many of them. Fewer American Catholics reiteration by Pope Paul VI of the church's traditional stand against artificial birth control (1968) alienated many, and the refusal of the church to give official sanction to remarriage after divorce disaffected still others. Still, the use of annulment by Catholic marriage tribunals (church courts) was, in effect, an endorsement of remarriage; and overall statistics showed a marked increase in the number of annulments granted. However, with or without clerical support, in the late eighties more and more American Catholics were, in the earlier words of the priest and sociologist Andrew Greeley, "going their own way." They were picking and choosing, deciding how and in what respects they would be Catholic. With a new voluntary style, Catholics selected what they wanted from the legacy of their church, and they did not all select the same things. Clearly, the habit of pluralism had taken hold.

In one sense, the bread-and-mortar church was still there: the Irish were still noticeable in pulpit and pew, and the diverse ethnic character of the church was still a prominent feature. A huge network of Catholic schools and colleges had scarcely folded up and disappeared. The radical moralists of left and right had gained Catholicism nationwide notice in the media, while the sacraments, still seven in number, gave solace to millions.

Yet the sacramentalism that had shaped the Catholic understanding of religion and human life had begun to crumble. Paraliturgical devotions seemed to melt away after Vatican II, and numbers of Catholics seemed to melt away from church attendance, too. Thousands of priests and nuns had returned to lay life, and new recruits had fallen off sharply. The sexual revolution and a revised sexual ethic signaled a moral sense profoundly different from that of the past. The refusal to accept the authority of the pope and bishops meant that they were

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no longer regarded, in the same traditional sense, as sacramental signs of Christ. The old order of things, in which ordinary and extraordinary mingled in sacramental unity, was yielding to a new pattern. Ordinary and extraordinary now were more separated and compartmentalized. Like Reform Jews and like mainstream Protestants, as we will see, Roman Catholics by discarding some of their sacramentalism were making clearer distinctions between the two. It was true that American Roman Catholics had made a complex move away from a medieval angle of vision and toward a modern one and that this move had been shared by many in world Catholicism. But the move was complicated by its context: "in America" Roman Catholicism was giving way to American Catholicism and, if you will, to Protestant-American Catholicism.

## In Overview

From the time of Christopher Columbus, Roman Catholicism had been present in North America. Early Spanish and then French missionaries brought their first taste of Christianity to American Indians, while with the arrival of English Catholic colonists in the seventeenth century, Catholicism entered the English seaboard colonies. The religion that was shared by all of these Catholics found holiness in nature as well as biblical and historical tradition. Through its sacramental vision, Roman Catholicism saw the material world as both the symbol and reality of divine things. This understanding crystallized in the seven sacraments of the Catholic cultus, but it was visible throughout the Catholic system. At the apex of the system, for Catholics, was Jesus Christ, whose presence they acknowledged in an annual liturgical cycle commemorating events in the gospel accounts of his life, death, and resurrection. Meanwhile, in a moral system that had developed over the years, Catholics lived their commitment to nature and traditional sources they considered revelation, adhering to natural law, scripture, and church teaching. Like Native Americans and Jews, in both cultus and code they tended to blend extraordinary with ordinary religion.

With this heritage behind it, the Catholic church in the United States faced changes brought by its internal ethnicity and the external pluralism of American culture. Spanish, French, Native American, and English Catholics were joined, as time passed, by German and Irish Catholics and later by Southern and Eastern Europeans and by Hispanic and some African-American and Asian peoples. These groups often strived to maintain the separate boundaries of their ethnic identity, and there were sometimes collisions among them. In this situation of internal manyness with its attendant tensions, the Irish came to dominate by the mid-nineteenth century and continued to do so into the twentieth century. In turn, the pluralism of American culture led to profound changes that swung the Catholic church more and more away from its "Roman" axis. Extraordinary and ordinary religion grew more separate, as Catholic boundaries opened out toward America. By the late twentieth century, catalyzed through

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the actions of the Second Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic church in America had become an American Catholic church that looked increasingly like the churches of mainstream Protestants.

Who were the people who had so influenced the religions of Catholic and Jewish immigrants? What kind of religion had drawn the many more and more toward itself with its cultural hegemony? It is time now to look at the mainstream Protestantism of America—a Protestantism that in the late twentieth-century, like Catholicism, regarded itself with anxiety and worried about its spiritual condition.

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