

Catholicism and Mayan religion. A key figure throughout the week is the Mayan god Maximón.<sup>28</sup> Maximón is one of the most popular Mayan gods, and shrines to him are scattered throughout Guatemala. Several towns have their own statue of Maximón. Within each town, there is a *cofradía* that cares for Maximón, facilitating visits to his shrine and receiving petitions and offerings that are made to him. Most petitions center around daily life: care for a sick relative, the return of a wayward spouse, the hope of employment. Maximón, to varying degrees, has become a Christianized Mayan god, and religiosity and iconography surrounding him often have Catholic elements. He is often referred to as San Simón, yet his Christian feast day is the feast of St. Peter.

In San Lucas one does not talk much of liberation theology. The great writings of Latin American liberation theologians came after the parish began its work, and it is best to understand this academic reflection as emerging from the context of such grassroots communities. When you speak to the people of San Lucas they do not speak of the preferential option for the poor, hermeneutics of suspicion, or the epistemic break that is demanded by a true acceptance of liberationist perspectives. They speak of the food on their tables, the homes they have been able to build, the education of their children, their healthcare, and the overall impact the church has had on their daily lives. The church in San Lucas reminds us of one of the great lessons of liberation theologians, the importance of action. It is a voice of dissent against injustice and of hope for social transformation.

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#### **IV. Catholic Thresholds, Spatial Contests, and the “Crisis in the Church”**

In Washington, DC, at the top of the long hill up Wisconsin Avenue where Massachusetts Avenue crosses Thirty-Fourth Street, there has been for a long time a fixture on the landscape. An old man, life scarred and

<sup>28</sup> For Maximón, see Jim Pieper, *Guatemala's Folk Saints: Maximón/San Simon, Rey Pascual, Judas, Lucifer, and Others* (Los Angeles: Pieper and Associates, 2002).

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perhaps homeless, perhaps schizophrenic, holds a big homemade sign that reads “Vatican Protects Pedophiles Worldwide.”

I have thought of that man often since, in the first days of 2002, the *Boston Globe* investigative journalist team exposed patterns of a cover-up of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy. Those in the Archdiocese of Boston learned that Cardinal Bernard Law, then among the most powerful clerics in the United States, was complicit in this cover-up. He had set internal administrative policies of settling with victims of clergy predation in confidential agreements and reassigning priests accused of sexual predation. How this long and ugly story became public is reasonably well known, thanks to the film *Spotlight*. But in Boston, the story didn’t stop where the movie left off. Over the course of a year, public revelations continued. Public shock and anger quickly galvanized a demand for accountability. Perceiving that neither the Chancery nor the Vatican was holding ecclesial officers sufficiently accountable, other Catholics began to organize themselves to try to change actors, culture, and institution. By the end of the year, America’s erstwhile preeminent cardinal was on a private plane to the Vatican. He had been effectively subject to a grassroots ousting.<sup>29</sup>

The brief study that follows illuminates issues of dissent, ex-Catholics, and forms of threshold belonging by sketching an ecosystem of demands for the accountability and reform of the institutional church. It is not possible to provide a rich rendition of the context of time and place, or to assess the variables that contributed to the relative success of this movement.<sup>30</sup> However, we can get a sense of how the fundamentals for the creation of power, organizing people, and organizing money, track with mobilizations in Boston among Roman Catholics.

### ***Organized People***

Among the organized people was a small but persistent and materially visible group of people who organized street protests against Cardinal Law. Beginning in January 2001, they gathered regularly outside Boston’s Cathedral of the Holy Cross on Sunday mornings. Some silently held signs with the faces of victims of sexual abuse as children. Some heckled those entering the cathedral, calling for the boycott of masses at which Cardinal Law presided. Catholic identity was incidental to the public action of protesters in the streets. Those on the threshold may or may not have identified their

<sup>29</sup> Much of this is detailed in the collected volume published by the investigative staff of the *Boston Globe: Betrayal: The Crisis in the Catholic Church* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, James M. O’Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

location with a sort of conditional belonging. However, the spatial position of the protesters was significant. By literally and symbolically occupying the threshold of the cathedral, discouraging entry, they disrupted the regular logic of Catholic belonging. The message of their bodies to practitioners, and to others as mediated by the news, was that literal “outsiders” were in the position of moral resistance and integrity. Protesters fostered friction with those materially “inside,” would-be attendants of Mass at the Cathedral of the Holy Cross.

Yet, symbolic lines of insider and outsider were also redrawn. Those in the pews organized and were critical in various ways. Moreover, they tended to describe their work not as dissent, but rather as fidelity to the church.<sup>31</sup> This was particularly conspicuous in two new lateral organizations that were initiated in Boston that year that explicitly asserted the Catholic identity and practice of their members and organizations. These collaborations produced a locally robust Catholic civil society, but one that was autonomous, separate from bishops and cardinals.<sup>32</sup>

The Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) became a nationally known lay group seeking changes in church administrative practices. Beginning in the affluent suburb of Wellesley, the group extended regionally and nationally. The slogan of VOTF, “Keep the Faith; Change the Church,” captures this delicate positioning. Presenting themselves as “Mainstream Catholics,” the lay members drew at first upon secular talent and professional training. However, as the group became subject to increasing efforts by the hierarchy to discredit them, lay members turned to theologians to present their doctrinal entitlement to lay participation.<sup>33</sup> Their press releases increasingly appealed to encyclicals of the Second Vatican Council and to canon law. In addition to employing terminology and themes of contemporary cultural discourses (e.g., exploitation, accountability, institutional corruption, and mental health), VOTF leaders presented dissonance between Catholic teachings and the policies of the institutional church.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Mary Jo Bane, “A Challenge to Lay Catholics,” *Boston Globe*, February 3, 2002.

<sup>32</sup> Universities, including the program at Boston College “Church in the Twenty-First Century,” played a related role. As a Jesuit institution, Boston College is not under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Boston.

<sup>33</sup> “Theologian Petition: Voice of the Faithful Has the Right to Exist,” drafted by Dr. Thomas Beaudoin, Dr. William Clark, SJ, and Dr. Anthony Massimini, [http://www.votf.org/Who\\_We\\_Are/theologian.html](http://www.votf.org/Who_We_Are/theologian.html).

<sup>34</sup> See Anthony Petro, “Beyond Accountability: The Queer Archive of Catholic Sexual Abuse,” *Radical History Review* 122 (Spring 2015): 160–76; “VOTF Statement regarding Bannings in Newark and Camden, NJ,” October 11, 2002, <http://www.votf.org/Press/pressrelease/allue.html>.

Parish priests also developed a lateral organization late in 2002, the Boston Priests' Forum (BPF). So-called priests of integrity, those who were not implicated by the scandal, created this group with the stated goal of providing emotional and practical support for parish clergy. Many suffered severe stress. The BPF was both unique and controversial at this time in the culture of the Boston archdiocese, in which centralized and vertical governance had been privileged. Officers of the church were outraged also by their public letter, which described Cardinal Law's ongoing role in the archdiocese as a source of scandal.

### *Organized money*

Organizing money was another way that Catholics in Boston created power. Lay Catholics, sometimes quietly organized by priests, coordinated in a financial boycott of the Cardinal's appeal. Conspicuously, this withholding was paired with continued support for Catholic Charities and charitable giving at the parish level. Over time, even formerly close advisers to Cardinal Law joined the project of placing donations to the archdiocese into escrow accounts, and naming Law's resignation from office the condition of their availability.

### *Analysis*

The new coalition formed in Boston crossed previously intense ideological and class divisions. Arguments over ecclesiology and doctrine receded before an increasingly shared agreement that in order to "save the church," Law must leave his position.<sup>35</sup> The new coalition also incorporated parish priests and Catholic Charities. Both were associated with the values and practice of pastoral care. The new intramural "other" that they confronted was "the hierarchy": officers of the Chancery, the US Conference of Bishops, and the Vatican.<sup>36</sup>

Certainly Catholics in Boston disagreed among themselves over the appropriate people, places, and strategies for registering discontent with the archdiocese as the crisis in the church unfolded. They had entered this time of crisis in an ecclesial culture in which Cardinal Law had promoted

<sup>35</sup> These included Paul Lacamera of Channel 5, Pat Bersell of the *Boston Herald*, and David Delicandro of John Hancock. In the *Boston Globe*, see Michael Paulson, "Most Catholics in Poll Fault Law's Performance," *Boston Globe*, February 8, 2002; Paulson, "Most Catholics in Poll Want Resignation," *ibid.*, April 17, 2002; and Paulson, "Catholics Want Change, Poll Finds," *ibid.*, May 11, 2003.

<sup>36</sup> See John Seitz, *No Closure: Catholic Practice and Boston's Parish Shutdowns* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

consistency with the priorities of natural law teachings under the pontificate of John Paul II. He also valued the centralization of church authority.<sup>37</sup> Here “dissent” had functioned as a charge by which the faithful who would challenge institutional power and its doctrinal priorities were disciplined and discredited. Positive identification with dissent from church teachings or even reform was very rare. Instead, those calling for the resignation of the cardinal or dramatic changes to policies positioned themselves not as *dissenters*, but rather as *entitled* to changes. Sometimes they did so in their Catholic particularity, by appealing to encyclicals, Scripture, and the ethics of pastoral care. In the process, some lay Catholics became practiced in claiming and asserting distinctively Catholic identity and principles. Other times, they used secular terms, framing their concerns as (criminal) negligence, loss of moral confidence in leadership by the faithful, or a failure to manage a growing public perception of institutional reputation. This case study also opens further consideration of ex-Catholics because of the way that past became present in the exposure and protests of 2002. Participation in Catholic life was the necessary condition for exposure to the sexual predation of clergy, and the suffering that it produced.

Finally, the risk of this research is that it attends to Catholics who could readily make themselves visible, whether professors at Boston’s great universities or donors whose conditions of gifts finally turned heads at the Vatican. The shame of the faithful is animated by a failure to recognize “the least of these”: the survivors and their loved ones suffering in active un-recognition. Thus this brief survey appropriately closes by honoring John Wojnowski, the sign-holding man on Massachusetts Avenue, and others like him whose reality was imperceptible to joggers like myself huffing past. Wojnowski is still outside every day. Massachusetts Avenue marks his distance from the threshold of the Vatican Embassy. He is not homeless. He is not crazy. He is organized by his vocation. “This is my job,” he told a reporter. “My life would have no meaning if I didn’t do this. Every day I am here, it’s difficult for me. They are stealing one day at a time from my life.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas H. O’Connor, *Boston Catholics: A History of the Church and Its People* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998).

<sup>38</sup> Tracy Jan, “After 17 Years, Lone Protester Still Holds Vigil at Vatican Embassy,” *Boston Globe*, September 22, 2015.