

“PRAY, PAY AND DISOBEY”:
CONFLICT AND SCHISM IN CATHOLIC AMERICA, 1870-1939

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In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century immigrant America, lay Catholics were not shy of turning to disruptive, even violent, means to solve disputes within their religious communities. They split into factions and fought each other in the church, on the street and in the courts. Often, the pastor was the key divisive figure in the conflict, with factions aligning in support of or opposition to him. Parishioners and even priests fought their bishops. Many lay Catholics employed militant, diplomatic, legal and schismatic strategies in order to secure what they most desired: control of the administration of parish finances and property. By examining their actions as strategic, this project seeks to restore agency to lay Catholics who are often presented in Catholic history as passive, submissive and blindly loyal to their priests, bishops and pope. In addition to strategic acts of militancy, such as rioting, lay Catholics made use of diplomatic conflict-resolution strategies, such as petitioning Roman Catholic prelates in order to secure a change of pastors. Sometimes, lay Catholics turned to the secular legal system for assistance in their efforts to secure control of parish property. When all else failed, conflicts begat schisms, such as the Polish National Catholic Church, which was established in 1897. Lay Catholics, however, shaped and transformed the Roman Catholic Church and Catholicism in America not only by schism, but also by the threat

of schism. Therefore, in addition to schismatics, this study includes lay people and priests who neared and even dabbled in schism, but ultimately did not leave the Roman Catholic Church. By doing so, this project aims to uncover complexities of conflict within Catholic America.

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CHAPTER 1

CONFLICT AND SCHISM IN AMERICAN CATHOLIC HISTORY

The adage “pray, pay and obey” captures the supposed passivity of lay Catholics, especially those who lived before the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). This description, however, is a generalization. In reality, many lay Catholics actively sought to shape their religious worlds for themselves. In other words, lay Catholics – who did pray and pay – often did not obey Roman Catholic authorities. In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century immigrant America, lay Catholics were not shy of turning to disruptive, even violent, means to solve disputes within their religious communities. They split into factions and fought each other in the church, on the street and in the courts. Often, the pastor was the key divisive figure in the conflict, with factions aligning in support of or opposition to him. Parishioners and even priests fought their bishops. In addition to strategic acts of militancy, such as rioting, lay Catholics made use of diplomatic conflict-resolution strategies, such as petitioning Roman Catholic prelates in order to secure a change of pastors. Sometimes, lay Catholics turned to the secular legal system for assistance in their efforts to retain, gain and regain control of parish property. When all else failed, conflicts begat schisms.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The term pluralism is often used to describe the religious state of contemporary America. Defined by one scholar as it as “the acceptance and encouragement of diversity,” pluralism is not only a process, but also “a work in progress.”¹ In other words, the United States is more than religiously pluralistic: it is continually becoming more so through the actions of its people. Although scholars recognize that pluralism has characterized America since its origins, and so is not a new phenomenon, it is often explored via studies of diversity within Protestantism. Protestant religious groups, therefore, have received special scholarly attention, while other groups (e.g., Catholics) are still not quite part of the familiar story of American religious history. Instead, Catholics are often presented as adding to an already religiously diverse country by means of immigration in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Challenging an earlier conception of pluralism as diversity in Christian sects, studies of late-nineteenth-century immigration, industrialization and urbanization pushed scholars to redefine pluralism as diversity within religious groups as well as between them.² However, diversity within American Catholicism, unlike within Protestantism, is understood too simplistically, most often in terms of ethnicity. Intra-Catholic pluralism, therefore, is typically examined through studies of difference between ethnic groups. A thorough study of conflict in Catholic America, however, uncovers pluralism within ethnic variations of Catholicism.

¹ William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 1.

² Charles H. Lippy, *Pluralism Comes of Age: American Religious Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), 3.

Many scholars of American religion see intra-Catholic pluralism as a twentieth-century phenomenon, ushered in by watershed events in Roman Catholic history such as, most notably, the Second Vatican Council.³ With Pope Paul VI's promulgation of *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), the Roman Catholic Church finally, after rejecting modernism one hundred years earlier in the *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), embraced the modern world with "joy and hope." Redefining the "Church" as "the People that God gathers in the whole world," the Second Vatican Council elevated the status of the laity within the Church: from those who simply "pray, pay and obey" to those who form the essence of the Church itself.⁴ Examining lay Catholics' reactions to mid-twentieth-century Church decrees such as *Humanae Vitae* (1968), scholars of American Catholic history demonstrate how modern mainstream influences emboldened post-Vatican II Catholics to defy their pastors' advice without fear of losing their Catholic identity.⁵ Intra-Catholic pluralism, however, has its roots in the nineteenth century, not the mid-twentieth century. This pluralism, exemplified by the reality that Catholics often fought with their priests and each other within ethnic parishes, as well as with their bishops, originated well before the 1960s. In fact, it characterized the American Roman Catholic Church from its origins.

The primary understanding of conflict in Catholic America as occurring between Roman Catholics and Protestants has led scholars to overlook conflict within the Roman Catholic Church, both between ethnic groups and within them. Although inter-religious disputes had considerable impact on Roman Catholic life in general, they were

³ See Chester Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1993).

<http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p123a9p1.htm> Accessed 09/17/14.

⁵ See, for example, Lippy, *Pluralism Comes of Age*.

of little day-to-day meaning to typical, working-class immigrant Catholics. Inter- and intra-Catholic conflict, on the contrary, were often part of lay Catholics' everyday lives, especially in some particularly troubled communities. Working-class immigrant Catholics seldom interacted directly with Protestants, who often held prejudiced, even racist, opinions of Catholics, regardless of ethnicity.⁶ However, they did frequently interact with many different varieties of Catholics, especially within the American Roman Catholic Church.

The best-known conflict-inducing interactions in American Catholic history occurred between the Irish (especially members of the Roman Catholic priesthood and the Church hierarchy) and eastern and southeastern Europeans (including members of the Roman Catholic priesthood, but not the Church hierarchy). A more complete study of conflict in Catholic America complicates that understanding by uncovering a laity that often fought with both priests and other lay people of the same ethnicity. By emphasizing intra- as well as inter-ethnic conflict, this project aims to draw attention to the diversity within American Catholicism. Doing so challenges scholars' depiction of a homogeneous Catholic laity, united in its struggle against an oppressively prejudiced, Protestant-dominated America.

Between 1840 and 1890, more than three million Irish immigrated to the United States; by 1900, there were five million first- and second-generation Irish, mostly in

⁶ James Barrett and David Roediger describe immigrants from eastern and southeastern Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as "Inbetween peoples." They argue: "native born and older immigrants [e.g., the Irish] often placed these newer immigrants not only above African and Asian Americans, for example, but also below 'white' people." In their words, the process of Americanization was very much a process of "whitening." [James R. Barrett and David Roediger, "Inbetween Peoples: Race, Nationality and the 'New Immigrant' Working Class," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 16, no. 3 (1997): 3-44.]

American cities.⁷ The eighteen million immigrants from eastern and southeastern Europe, who arrived in the United States from 1890 to 1920, in two scholars' words, "had to deal with the entrenched Irish."⁸ To these new immigrants, the Irish were "Americans" and as such functioned as role models for Americanization.⁹ By 1879, the Irish solidly controlled the Roman Catholic Church in America and defined what it meant to be Catholic for its newest members.¹⁰ Although the Irish never accounted for more than half the Roman Catholics in the United States, by 1920, two-thirds of bishops and one-third of priests were either Irish or Irish-American.¹¹ Irish leadership within the Roman Catholic Church pushed immigrant Roman Catholics toward their Americanization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Interestingly, the very same kind of Irish prelates also permitted the formation of ethnic parishes to meet the needs (and demands) of the Church's newest members.

Generalizing conflict in American Catholic history as an inter-ethnic dispute between new Catholic immigrants from eastern and southeastern Europe and the Irish downplays the complexity of individual conflicts. True, immigrant Catholics often described their conflicts within their parishes and dioceses in ethnic terms. They did so, however, strategically. By consciously framing their parish-level conflicts in terms of ethnicity, lay Catholics sought to gain the sympathy of outsiders, particularly Roman Catholic prelates who had the power to effect the changes they desired to see within

⁷ Barrett and Roediger, "Inbetween Peoples," 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰ Jay P. Dolan, *The Irish Americans: A History* (New York: Bloombury Press, 2008), 108.

¹¹ *Ibid.*; Barrett and Roediger, "The Irish and the 'Americanization' of the 'New Immigrants,'" 18.

their parishes. In addition, lay Catholics engaged in parish-level conflicts made use of ethnicity-based arguments in order to attract support among their fellow parishioners who were otherwise ethnically indifferent.

Outsiders, including Roman Catholic prelates, often did accept immigrant lay Catholics' language- and ethnicity-based presentations of parish-level conflicts. So too have historians, which has led studies of Catholicism in immigrant America to focus on differences between, instead of within, ethnic variations. By stressing the origins of particular ethnic groups, such studies tend to support theories that intertwine ethnic identity with religious identity. Historians of Polish immigration, for example, typically display a keen awareness of their research subjects' "Catholicism," generally interpreting it as a loyal adherence to the Roman Catholic faith and obedience to Roman Catholic authorities. The stereotype "*Polak-Katolik*" (Polish-Catholic) embodies the intertwining of Polish national identity with Polish Catholic identity. However, historians should reevaluate their tendencies to make claims like: "Catholicism came in the trunks of immigrants along with their other prized possessions."¹² In reality, supposedly solid "Catholic" immigrants, in the words of two scholars, "were at best potential American Catholic parishioners."¹³ A study of conflict within Catholic America uncovers an immigrant Catholic laity that was not nationalized, but, at best, nationalizing. By strategically adopting language to highlight ethnic differences, lay Catholics sought to gain support for their causes both within their parishes and from without.

¹² James M. O'Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 99.

¹³ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *Churching of America: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 177.

In general, scholars of Polish America agree that by the end of the nineteenth century, Polish patriotism was associated with Roman Catholicism.¹⁴ When those people who lived in the historically Polish lands in central Europe became themselves “Polish” is of debate among historians. Polish nationalism developed much earlier among the nobility than among the largely peasant masses, a surge which, Norman Davies argues, was “provoked by the Partitions” of 1773 to 1795.¹⁵ However, scholars disagree over the extent to which the peasantry felt themselves to be a part of a “Polish” nation. Scholars like Victor Greene argue that the rise in “ethnic consciousness” occurred in the United States and was well developed by the start of World War I, when Polish Americans strongly supported an independent Polish state. Immigrants from eastern and southeastern Europe generally did not identify themselves as, for example, “Polish” or part of a so-called “Polish nation” or “Polonia” prior to immigrating. Instead, they mostly identified themselves with their local or regional origins, such as their parish, village or province. Stressing the importance of determining immigrants’ group consciousness upon arrival to the United States, Greene divides “ethnicization,” or the process of “ethnic consciousness-making,” into three categories of nationalism: ethnic “naiveté,” “cultural” or “polycentric” nationalism and nationalism itself.¹⁶ Polish immigrants, he argues, displayed an ethnic “naiveté,” meaning they shared similar characteristics with other immigrants, such as a common

¹⁴ See, for example, James S. Pula, “Why is it that Only the Poles Cause Trouble?: Cultural Determinism in the Founding of the Polish National Catholic Church,” *PNCC Studies* 15 (1994): 31-45.

¹⁵ Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 236.

¹⁶ Victor Greene, *For God and Country: The Rise of Polish and Lithuanian Ethnic Consciousness in America, 1860-1910* (Madison, WI: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1975), 3-4.

language, but “they had little or no feeling of membership in an ethnic nation.”¹⁷ It was only after coming to the United States, Green argues, that immigrants developed a sense of “Polish” nationalism.¹⁸

Not all working-class immigrant lay Catholics living in turn-of-the-twentieth-century United States or Canada had much interest in contemplating their identities. After all, they had more pressing concerns, such as their survival, which was daily challenged by their abject poverty and poor living and working conditions. Historians can agree that “Poles” and other ethnic groups from eastern and southeastern Europe were “imagined communities,” not unlike “Catholics.”¹⁹ However, as one scholar warns, we should be careful not to be “blind” to those who “remained altogether aloof to the nation’s appeal.”²⁰ Ethnically charged conflicts within diverse Roman Catholic parishes quite possibly nudged more Catholics toward “national indifference” than toward nationalism. In their desire to be “good Catholics,” lay people were likely to put up with their parish’s imperfection, and thus avoid religious conflict, in order to ensure their own salvation and that of their children. After all, every lay Catholic knew that any priest could refuse to provide the sacraments, and any bishop could sentence an individual to excommunication for disobedience. The spiritual consequences of such actions were enough to convince most lay Catholics to steer clear of intra-parish quarrels. Including nationally indifferent Catholics in the history of conflict in Catholic

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁹ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

²⁰ Tara Zahra, “Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis,” *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (2010): 96.

America, however, provides a practical problem: they left little evidence of their existence, or their views, for historians. Therefore, scholars must be aware that extant sources reflect the views of particularly motivated and passionate people.

Scholars have repeatedly observed that the changes ushered in by the Second Vatican Council mark a significant turning point in American Catholic history, as does the coming of the Irish in the mid-nineteenth century. The influx of eastern and southeastern Europeans into the American Roman Catholic Church in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, is still of vague significance. The perception that these immigrants found solidarity within their ethnic groups and their common Catholic identity, which enabled them to successfully enter the Roman Catholic Church with minimal discomfort, dominates scholarship on the history of Catholicism and immigration in America. A deeper study of conflict in Catholic America uncovers a quite different history, one in which lay people regularly clashed with each other within a Church that was very Irish. Ethnic difference explains only some conflict in American Catholic history, not all. Immigrants from eastern and southeastern Europe did fight with Irish priests and bishops who dominated their old Church in their new homeland. But more frequently and more fervently, they also fought with each other.

1.2 INDEPENDENTISM AND THE POLISH NATIONAL CATHOLIC CHURCH

Histories of Catholicism in America typically handle intra-church conflict, if they do so at all, through a brief summary of the Polish National Catholic Church (PNCC). Often

mistaken as the only schism from the Roman Catholic Church in America, the PNCC – founded in Scranton, Pennsylvania, in 1897, under the leadership of an ordained Roman Catholic priest, Rev. Franciszek (Francis) Hodur – is the most enduring result of the Independent Catholic movement. Independentism emerged in the last decade of the nineteenth century as a religious movement among immigrant Catholics in the United States and Canada who moved away from the Roman Catholic Church and formed and joined separate, yet still self-described “Catholic,” religious institutions. Besides the PNCC, there were also sizable, and competing, Independent Catholic movements centered in Chicago, Cleveland, Ohio, and Buffalo, New York. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the PNCC emerged as the preeminent Independent Catholic Church in the United States and Canada. Experiencing its largest growth at the end of the “New Immigration” from eastern and southeastern Europe to the United States in the 1920s, Independentism struggled against aggressive Roman Catholic efforts to obstruct its growth.²¹ In the end, such efforts were largely successful: permanent schisms were exceptional. However, the American Roman Catholic Church did not remain unchanged for the experience. First- and second-generation immigrant Catholics from eastern and southeastern Europe shaped and transformed the Roman Catholic Church and Catholicism in America not only by schism, but also by the threat of schism. Therefore, the term Independentism must be broadened to include not only *schismatics*, but also *near-schismatics* and *sympathizers*.

²¹ The end of this migration is marked by the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924 (The Johnson-Reed Act), which greatly reduced immigration to the United States, especially from central, eastern and southern Europe. For example, nearly 70% of all PNCC parishes were established from the beginning of World War I until the end of World War II. [This is my own estimate based on more than 200 PNCC parishes (active and inactive) for which I was able to find foundation dates.]

Schismatics – those who formed and joined Independent Catholic churches, including PNCC parishes – left the Roman Catholic Church entirely, yet remained “Catholic.” It is a broader understanding of the term “Catholic” – embraced by Independent Catholics despite its rejection by Roman Catholics, especially members of its hierarchy, who understood “Catholic” as meaning exclusively “Roman Catholic” – which I adopt in such phrases as “American Catholic history.” To schismatics, I add *near-schismatics*, who neared and even dabbled in schism, but ultimately did not leave the Roman Catholic Church. To these two types of schismatics, I add *sympathizers*, who avoided conflict with the Roman Catholic Church, yet showed signs of sympathy for schismatics and near-schismatics. Although near-schismatics and sympathizers in American Catholic history cannot be quantified, they should not be overlooked. Certainly outnumbering schismatics, their mere existence, no matter how fleeting, indicates wide dissatisfaction amongst the American Roman Catholic laity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By including all three of these types of Catholics in my study – schismatics, near-schismatics and sympathizers – I seek to uncover complexities of Independentism and conflict in American Catholic history.

Independentism arose in the context of ultramontanistism, which grew in Europe over the nineteenth century partly to meet the demands of Catholics for a stronger, centralized Church. For many Catholics in the midst of revolutionary chaos, the pope took on the role of a “martyr,” suffering for the embattled ancestral faith of Europe.²² Although somewhat paradoxical, Catholics seeking “liberty” from secularizing states

²² Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser, *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 23.

turned to an authoritarian pope for guidance.²³ The Roman Catholic Church took advantage of this attention and acted to strengthen papal authority. The development of ultramontanist culminated in the doctrine of papal infallibility, further strengthening the pope as an authority and moral guide. Bishops attending the First Vatican Council (1869-70) heavily debated the primacy of the papal office and the pontiff of Rome's infallible teaching authority when speaking *ex cathedra*.²⁴ *Pastor aeternus* traced papal primacy and infallibility to Saint Peter, the first bishop of Rome, thus reinforcing the ancient roots of the Roman Catholic Church in the midst of a modernizing world. Although many Catholics welcomed this development, some, such as those who broke away from Rome to form the Old Catholic Church, rejected it.

The Old Catholic Movement in Europe was a reaction against certain claims of the papacy made during the rise of ultramontanist in the nineteenth century, including the doctrine of papal infallibility. According to its *Declaration of Utrecht* (1899), the Old Catholic Church accepts "the unanimously accepted decisions of the Ecumenical Councils held in the undivided Church of the first thousand years," namely, those councils held before the Great Schism of 1054 that divided Byzantine from Roman Catholicism.²⁵ "We therefore," continues the declaration, "reject the decrees of the so-called Council of the Vatican," arguing that the doctrine of papal infallibility is "in contradiction with the faith of the ancient Church."²⁶ The declaration also supports the founding of national churches, which the Roman Catholic Church condemned in the

²³ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁴ *Pastor aeternus* (*The First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ*) passed by a vote of 533 to 2. However, 57 delegates essentially abstained from voting by departing Rome a day earlier [Clark and Kaiser, *Culture Wars*, 21].

²⁵ "The Declaration of Utrecht, September 24, 1889," *Modern History Sourcebook*. <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1889utrecht.html>> Accessed 11/26/2008.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Syllabus of Errors (1864) as attempts to dodge papal authority.²⁷ Independent Catholic leaders in America established ties with the Old Catholic movement in Europe and in the United States.²⁸ This was done most visibly through the consecration of four Independent Catholic leaders by Old Catholic bishops, thus obtaining Apostolic Succession for their Churches. Independent Catholic leaders also found support for their movements by aligning them with sixteenth-century national movements within the European Roman Catholic Church.

Established at the Council of Trent (1545-1563) partly in response to the Protestant Reformation, Tridentine Catholicism set the stage for the Roman Catholic Church's dealings with modernity in the nineteenth century.²⁹ At the council, Church leaders aimed to make Roman Catholicism, a global religion, more uniform by defining orthodoxy, standardizing the Mass and various rituals and consolidating the authority of the pope. Inspired by the Protestant Reformation, sixteenth-century Polish reformers tried to revive an older Catholic Church, one that closer resembled the Church established by Saints Cyril and Methodius in the ninth century.³⁰ One such reformer, Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski, presented recommendations to Trent including the establishment of a "National Church" for each nation, the translation of the liturgy into the vernacular, a married clergy and the use of the Bible as the only source of divine

²⁷ *The Declaration of Utrecht*: "We also renew the ancient protests of the Catholic Church of Holland against the errors of the Roman Curia, and against its attacks upon the rights of national Churches."; *Syllabus of Errors* (1864), Article 37.

²⁸ In particular, with Rev. Joseph Rene Vilatte, a French-born itinerant Old Catholic bishop based in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

²⁹ Nicholas Atkin and Frank Tallett, *Priests, Prelates, and People: a History of European Catholicism since 1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 3; The actions taken at Trent defined the Roman Catholic Church until the next ecumenical council was held in 1869-70 (First Vatican Council).

³⁰ Polish king Mieszko I converted to Roman Catholicism in 966, thus marking the traditional start of Polish history.

teaching.³¹ After the rejection of Modrzewski's recommendations, Jesuits were sent to Poland to enforce the decrees of Trent, thus stifling the reform movement. Although Poland remained Roman Catholic, the influence of reformers such as Modrzewski long lingered within the Church. Thus, early PNCC sources retell the history of the Reformation in Poland, linking it to Independentism in the United States and Canada more than three centuries later.³²

1.3 THE "BATTLE FOR CONTROL" IN CATHOLIC AMERICA

In an influential collection of essays published in 1979, the labor historian David Montgomery identifies the primary struggle of the American worker as "the battle for control of the workplace."³³ I identify the primary struggle of the immigrant Catholic (who was most often also a worker) as the battle for control of the parish. Above all, lay Catholics across immigrant America most desired control: lay control of the

³¹ "The Polish National Catholic Church," in *35th Anniversary of the Holy Family Polish National Catholic Church, McKeesport, Pa. Pamiętnik 35-cio letniego jubileuszu Parafii Św. Rodziny Polsko Narodowego Katolickiego Kościoła, McKeesport, Pa.: 1921-1956* (1956). The PNCC introduced a Polish-language Mass in 1901. It abolished mandatory clerical celibacy in 1921.

³² According to PNCC sources, the Roman Catholic Church successfully stifled the reform movement in Poland by sending Jesuits to evangelize among the easily influenced "unenlightened village folk," thus more solidly establishing Poland as a Roman Catholic country ["The Polish National Catholic Church," *35th Anniversary of the Holy Family Polish National Catholic Church*, 5]. PNCC Prime Bishop Leon Grochowski (1953-1969) summarizes this failed attempt at reform thus: "Polish tolerance of religious faiths was a source of irritation to her neighboring countries and especially to the propagators of Roman Catholicism. Poland became invaded by the Jesuits who took over the youth and the education and corrupted the two" [Leon Grochowski, "New Paths," in *Rola Boża/Przebudzenie/God's Field: Bishop Franciszek Hodur: 1866-1966* (Scranton, PA: Polish National Catholic Church, 1966), 45]. Citing Polish historian Jan Grabiec, an author of a PNCC history notes: "This persecution [by the Jesuits] severed the Ukraine from Poland, incited chaos among the people, dampened the fires of patriotism and dug a grave into which Russia, Prussia and Austria buried Poland with three notorious partitions, enacted in 1773, 1792 and 1795. Thus, the curtain fell on the second attempt to bring religious freedom to Poland...But the desire for religious freedom did not die, it continued to live in the hearts and minds of the Polish people" [*Ibid.*].

³³ David Montgomery, *Workers Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 4.

administration of parish property, finances and employees (especially priests). In other words, they desired to control what they deemed to be within the temporal sphere of parish life. The spiritual sphere of parish life, on the other hand, was seen as best left to the control of God's special representatives on Earth: the priests and bishops of the Roman Catholic Church. From the perspective of immigrant lay Catholics, this arrangement was best not only for their earthly lives, but also, and more importantly, for their eternal lives. As long as Roman Catholic priests and/or bishops did not try to wrest control from the laity, parish life would carry on quite peacefully. When they did try, however, conflict often erupted. Although most intra-Roman Catholic conflicts resolved without schism – the most visible outcome of conflict in Catholic America – conflict did change the Church. The experience of the battle for control within Catholic America was transformative, just like the worker's battle within his workplace.

Taking much inspiration from historians who, like Montgomery, urged others to examine the battle for control from workers' perspectives, I argue that we must look at the similar battle for control within the Roman Catholic Church through the eyes of its biggest troublemakers: ordinary lay men and women. I am not primarily interested in what was done to immigrant Catholics by forces of authority within the American Roman Catholic Church. Instead, I seek to discover what they did for themselves and how they did it. I draw inspiration from radical historians like Montgomery who, as defined by one scholar, "focused on issues of exploitation, domination, and oppression."³⁴ Similar to such historians, I too consciously focus "on ordinary people rather than political elites, on groups rather than individuals, and on human agency

³⁴ Jonathan M. Wiener, "Radical Historians and the Crisis in American History, 1959-1980," *The Journal of American History* 76, no. 2 (1989): 399.

rather than on abstract or general processes of change.”³⁵ The reputation of Catholic identity as a unifying power is overly simplistic. In reality, the Roman Catholic parish was often a center of disruption. The merger of new immigrants from eastern and southeastern Europe with the American Roman Catholic Church was far from unproblematic: it was marred by conflict. Throughout my study, I identify common origins, goals, strategies and results of these conflicts.

1.3.1 CHAPTER OUTLINE

One chapter is devoted to each of the four categories of lay agency employed in the battle for control of the Roman Catholic parish: militant, diplomatic, legal and schismatic. By examining the actions of lay Catholics as strategic (i.e., intentional acts done in the pursuit of goals seen as attainable), I seek to restore agency to actors who are often presented in Catholic history as passive, submissive and blindly loyal to their priests, bishops and the pope. Contrary to this common description, lay men and women frequently and fervently challenged those in positions of authority in the Church, thereby rejecting their presumed duty, as Catholics, to obey. Militant, diplomatic, legal and schismatic strategies were never mutually exclusive: lay Catholics pursued multiple strategies simultaneously in their attempts to resolve conflicts within their parishes. Frequently, the failure of one strategy would spur the use of another. For example, bishops’ failures to quickly act on the suggestions put forth in petitions frustrated lay Catholics, thus increasing a conflict’s potential to erupt into riot. Legal strategies typically resulted from failed diplomatic strategies used to resolve conflicts within the Roman Catholic Church. Schism was almost always the result of the failure

³⁵ *Ibid.*

of a combination of militant, diplomatic and legal strategies and hence, the ultimate resolution to lay Catholics' battle for control within Catholic America. Therefore, although the potential for schism always lingered, it is the focus of only the final chapter.

Chapter two, "Militant Strategies," examines the aggressive tactics and coercive strategies lay men and women used in their attempts to secure control within their Roman Catholic parishes. Regardless of the end result, almost all conflicts included some amount of militant strategy. Dividing such strategies into two types, collective and individual, chapter two examines some common and widely used collective militant tactics – priest lockouts, mob actions and rioting – and some lesser-used, though significant individual militant ones – assault, death threats, killings and arson. Militant acts such as rioting were often public events and so attracted much outside attention, including that of the mainstream English-language press. Identifying hundreds of incidents of unrest in such reportage allows conflict in Catholic America to be mapped. According to this map, one incident of unrest typically is not isolated, but instead reflects a longer history of unrest and conflict within a particular Catholic community, which often spans several decades and involves multiple generations of parishioners, priests and bishops. Even all recorded incidents of unrest, however, do not make an exhaustive history of conflict in Catholic America. Instead, a map of conflict in Catholic America must be used as a guide to uncover new, conflict-ridden dimensions of American Catholic history.

Chapter three, "Diplomatic Strategies," examines how lay Catholics strategically articulated their parish-level struggles to members of the Roman Catholic Church

hierarchy in terms of language and ethnicity in order to evoke sympathy and spur action in their favor. Knowing that their bishops would not be sympathetic to their desires to secure control within their parishes, lay Catholics emphasized reasons for discontent that did not conflict with developments in the nineteenth-century Church, which saw the further centralization of power within the office of the bishop at the expense of the laity. The close examination of one parish-level conflict in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, in the 1870s/1880s shows how what could easily be described as an “ethnic” conflict (i.e., “Polish” vs. “Lithuanian” parishioners) was, in reality, much more complex. In their early letters and petitions to the archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia, James Frederick Wood, one faction of Shenandoah lay Catholics carefully presented their parish-level struggle as one of language, which, according to them, could be easily resolved via the replacement of their current priest with a Lithuanian-speaking priest. When their diplomatic efforts to secure a change of pastors failed, leaders of Saint Casimir’s “Lithuanian” faction began to agitate for a new Lithuanian parish, which they justified in terms of not only language, but also ethnicity. By intentionally articulating their troubles to outsiders in terms of language and ethnicity via diplomatic tactics, Shenandoah lay Catholics strategically attempted to gain support for their cause and to escalate their parish-level struggle to the level of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

Chapter four, “Legal Strategies,” examines the civil legal actions lay Catholics took in order to secure control within their parishes. According to one particular title of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore (1884), Roman Catholic dioceses were to legally establish themselves as corporations sole. The implication was that all property within

a diocese was controlled by one person: the bishop who served in the office of the corporation sole. In this way, diocesan property became not the personal property of the bishop, but that of a single incorporated office, which ensured smooth transfer of ownership from one bishop to the next. However, implementing this ideal form of church property ownership within the context of the American legal system often proved difficult for Roman Catholic authorities. This was especially true in states such as Pennsylvania, which long vested the power to control ecclesiastical property in religious congregations. In addition, the fact that many lay Catholics legally held title to parish property pursuant to the popular system of trustees vexed attempts to centralize property control within the offices of Roman Catholic bishops. Not wanting to give up the control possessed by virtue of their ownership of parish property, lay Catholics legally challenged Roman Catholic bishops by, most often, suing for rights to parish property. Doing so exhibited a blatant disregard for the authority of Roman Catholic prelates. However, lay Catholics knowingly risked being labeled disobedient in order to secure the control they strongly desired within their parishes.

Chapter five, “Schism,” examines four sizable Independent Catholic movements in Buffalo, New York (1895-1911); Chicago (1895-1907); Cleveland, Ohio (1894-1907); and Scranton, Pennsylvania (1897-today). Long-lasting schisms, however, were exceptional. Most were short-lived, lasting less than ten years. Schism was the ultimate resolution to lay Catholics’ battle for control within the Roman Catholic parish. However, most Roman Catholic parishes that experienced conflict did not see schism. By comparing long-lived and short-lived schisms, this chapter reveals common causes for schism and near-schism in American Catholic history. Although schism is the most

visible evidence of the impact of the battle for control within the Roman Catholic parish, conflict in American Catholic history encompassed much more than schism. The threat of conflict and schism motivated many Roman Catholic prelates to compromise with, in their eyes, disobedient lay people rather than risk losing souls to schism, which they deliberately sought to stifle in their dioceses. In many ways, the American Roman Catholic Church was successful in its attacks on Independentism and schism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: only one Independent movement, the Polish National Catholic Church, survives to this day. However, lay Catholics who did not establish or join Independent Catholic parishes, or who did so but soon returned to the Roman Catholic Church, were often successful in precipitating (or preventing) change within their parishes. In other words, they secured an acceptable amount of control within their parishes with their near-schismatic actions.

1.3.2 SOURCES

Historical sources pose particular challenges to the composition of a history of conflict in Catholic America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As with any history from below, writing a popular history of Catholicism in America requires some creativity on the part of the researcher. Somehow, Independent Catholic and Roman Catholic perspectives, which vary widely, must be reconciled. Authors were always on one side or the other of individual conflicts and so wrote with their own agendas: generally either in support of Independentism or against it. Most people involved in conflicts – not only schismatics, but also near-schismatics and sympathizers – did not

write of their experiences. Hence, the voices of ordinary lay men and women must be gleaned from extant sources written by particularly motivated and passionate people.

The PNCC is the best resource for Independent Catholic perspectives, because it not only produced a lot of material, but also preserved a lot of material. In addition to unique documents housed at its own archive facility in Scranton, Pennsylvania, the PNCC's published books, pamphlets and periodicals (e.g., *Straż*, *Rola Boża*) provide a rich archival base for a researcher with a language competency in Polish. Polish was used as the exclusive language of worship in the Church from the introduction of a Polish-language Mass in 1901 (except in its Lithuanian and Slovak parishes) until the approval of an English-language Mass in 1958. Polish was also the main language of Church business into the 1970s. Thus, PNCC sources are largely inaccessible to the average English-speaking scholar of American religious history.

Although schismatics, near-schismatics and sympathizers in American Catholic history were most often Polish speakers, many spoke other even less popular languages, including Slovak, Lithuanian, Croatian, Hungarian and even Italian. Thus language has been, and continues to be a powerful obstacle to the proper inclusion of Independentism in American Catholic history. Unlike Catholics from eastern and southeastern Europe, the Irish spoke English and left historical sources in the English language. This, along with the fact that the Irish were such a large and influential ethnic group, has led to a wealth of historical research on the Irish in America. Although they quickly outnumbered the Irish, immigrants from eastern and southeastern Europe were underrepresented in the priesthood and hierarchy of the

American Roman Catholic Church, which was dominated by Irish and Irish Americans well into the twentieth century.³⁶ Thus, their impact on Catholicism is harder to see.

Compiling an exhaustive list of Independent Catholic parishes would be a near impossible task, since many were short-lived and left little trace of their existence. Even a complete list of all PNCC parishes, active as well as inactive, is only nearly achievable. At least three hundred PNCC parishes existed in the United States and Canada, and nearly one hundred fifty were established in Poland after World War II.³⁷ However, many are still unaccounted for, even in PNCC records. Plotting the PNCC parishes that can be confirmed on a map of the United States and Canada creates a visual image of conflict in Catholic America that is concentrated in the northeast and central midwest, regions of sizable populations of immigrants from eastern and southeastern Europe.



Figure 1. PNCC parishes in the Northeast and Central Midwest United States (active and inactive)

³⁶ The first Polish bishop in the Roman Catholic Church in America, Paul Rhode, was appointed in 1915. He served as the bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Green Bay, Wisconsin, until his death in 1945.

³⁷ The church in Poland [renamed Kościół Polskokatolicki (Polish Catholic Church)] has been independent since 1951 due to tensions with the Polish communist government.



Figure 2. PNCC parishes in the United States and Canada (active and inactive)

Another reason why conflict is not a part of dominant narrative of American Catholic history is because, by and large, it has been censored. The Roman Catholic Church's own histories, published in diocesan history books, parish anniversary booklets, clergy biographies and diocesan and parish websites, do not record the Church's rich history of internal conflict. The Roman Catholic Church's discouragement of memorializing conflict, and, sometimes, even recognizing its occurrence, contributed to making the history of conflict in Catholic America a forgotten one. Even Roman Catholic archives contain limited sources on the Church's internal conflicts. Often, communities with histories of repeating periods of intense conflict go unnoted in the finding aides in Roman Catholic archives. Therefore, available sources dictated what conflicts I explore most closely in this project.

The Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, has dozens of documents related to numerous conflicts within several different Roman Catholic parishes in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, that span six decades. Thus, chapter three focuses on one particularly well-documented conflict which, importantly, is preserved with sources that have been made accessible to researchers. Shenandoah and nearby towns that are also examined in this project were not placed under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Allentown until its creation in 1961. The entire territory of Pennsylvania, as well as Delaware and the southern half of New Jersey fell within the original Roman Catholic Diocese of Philadelphia established by Pope Paul VII in 1808. Therefore, this project examines the role of Roman Catholic archbishops of Philadelphia in conflicts in Shenandoah and nearby towns, namely James Frederick Wood (1860-1883), Patrick John Ryan (1884-1911), Edmond Francis Prendergast (1911-1918) and Dennis Joseph Cardinal Dougherty (1918-1951). The collections of their correspondences housed at the Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center provided ample evidence for piecing together the story of conflict in Catholic Shenandoah.

James Frederick Wood	1860-1883
Patrick John Ryan	1884-1911
Edmond Francis Prendergast	1911-1918
Dennis Joseph Cardinal Dougherty	1918-1951

Figure 3. Administration Dates of Archbishops of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia

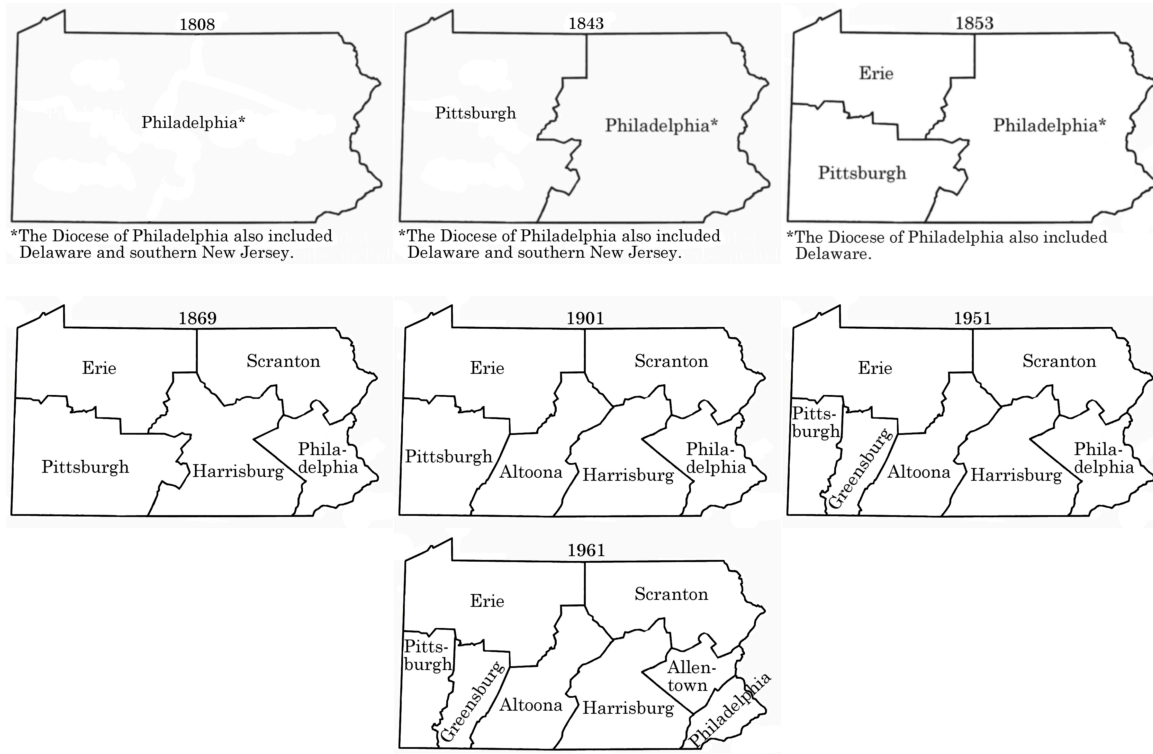


Figure 4. Shifting Territorial Lines of Roman Catholic Dioceses in Pennsylvania

1.4 CONCLUSION

Although immigrant lay Catholics were well aware of their lowly place within their hierarchical Church and society, this, their priests would have frequently assured them, was not important: heaven would be their reward for their piety and obedience. This message – be a “good Catholic” (i.e., obedient, especially to Church authorities), and salvation will be your reward – was appealing to many working-class immigrant Catholics who, frankly, had little reason to hope that their labors would be richly rewarded within their own lifetimes. The reality that many lay Catholics did disobey – and thus put not only their personal but also their family members’ salvation at risk –

shows the extreme importance they placed on lay control within their parishes. The adage that Catholics “pray, pay and obey” is inaccurate. Catholics surely disobeyed: they disobeyed their priests and their bishops, and they did so well before the 1960s. They did not, however, disobey haphazardly. They did so strategically in order to secure what they desired most within their parishes: control.

CHAPTER 2

MILITANT STRATEGIES

The Rev. Stephen Kamiński hid inside his church's side door, and, aided by five altar boys reloading his revolvers, fired at an incensed mob of parishioners and townspeople gathered in the churchyard. After Mass that morning in March 1895, ten men who opposed Kamiński had entered Saint Paul's Roman Catholic Church (Polish) in Omaha, Nebraska, and demanded his keys, seeking to take possession of the property. When Kamiński refused, the men threatened him. The priest pulled out a revolver and fired, hitting one of his assailants. The injured man crawled out of the church and yelled, "Kill him! I am shot!" Two-dozen shots were fired between Kamiński and the men within the sanctuary. One bullet pierced an image of the Virgin Mary. According to the *New York Times*, scores of "hot-headed Poles" from the immigrant, working-class neighborhood flocked to the scene. Men, women and children "entered the churchyard, hooted and yelled, and brandished clubs and revolvers, calling others to their aid to take the priest from the building and hang him."¹

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Inspired by the sociological concept of collective violence, this chapter examines the use of collective militancy in conflicts within Catholic America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Whereas collective violence, in the scholarship of Charles

¹ "A Fight Follows Mass," *New York Times*, March 13, 1895.

Tilly, includes events that inflict “physical damage,” events of collective militancy can inflict a range of damage: physical (includes people and objects), psychological, social and material.² In addition to common and widely used collective militant tactics – priest lockouts, mob actions and rioting – this chapter also examines some lesser-used, though significant individual militant tactics – assault, death threats, killings and arson. The use of aggressive and sometimes violent tactics formed an integral part of lay Catholics’ battles to secure the control they sought within their parishes. Lay Catholics only strategically disobeyed Roman Catholic Church authorities, but they did so in quite public and violent ways.

Using the term militant instead of violent avoids the restrictions by which the term violent is typically hindered in the fields of history and sociology. The word “militant” has a connotation of purpose and control, which “violent” often lacks. A violent strategy may sound crude to many ears; whereas a militant strategy sounds like a definitive action plan. Using a term like militant strategy forces scholars to seriously consider the motivations behind the actions lay Catholics took in their attempts to effect the change they desired to see within their parishes. Such actions should not be banished to the unseemly category of social deviance. Militant strategies were, above all, aggressive. Often, they were purposefully dramatic, crafted spectacles intended to heighten a community’s awareness of a parish’s internal foibles. In this view of conflict, troublemaking lay Catholics were not crazed rebels, but rather clever strategists. From their perspective, they were not acting disobediently or rebelliously, but rather with good intentions: to shape their Church to better meet their spiritual needs.

² Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3; Mary R. Jackman, “Violence in Social Life,” *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 28 (2002): 405.

A militant strategy is aggressive and can include violence. Violence can encompass a variety of activities and results that “inflict, threaten or cause injury.”³ Those injured by violence in American Catholic history include not only people who were physically wounded or killed, but also people who experienced psychological stress, exclusion from their community and/or financial or employment-related difficulties. Lay Catholics who engaged in militant acts in the battle for control in Catholic America, as well as their family members, could incur such injuries. For example, knowing that a loved one who left the Roman Catholic Church as a result of conflict may never enter heaven (since, according to the Roman Catholic theology of the pre-Vatican II era, the Church was the only vehicle to salvation) could have caused real psychological stress. The frequent use of militant tactics to secure control within their parishes shows not that lay Catholics were ignorant of the risk of “injury” to themselves and to their family members, but that for many the potential benefits – including spiritual benefits – outweighed the risk of incurring physical, psychological, social and material harm.

In *The Politics of Collective Violence*, Tilly examines how collective violence “emerges from the ebb and flow of collective claim making and struggles for power.”⁴ Likewise, in much of Catholic America, collective militancy emerged from the ebb and flow of lay Catholics collectively claiming control within their parishes. Much as storm systems arise and dissipate, collective claim-making carried on for decades within many Catholic communities, with conflict periodically striking like lightning. Many immigrant communities were hotspots of religious unrest, often located within regions

³ Jackman, “Violence in Social Life,” 405.

⁴ Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, 624.

periodically teeming with conflict. Overall, however, perhaps the best metaphor for the history of conflict in Catholic America is a pot of simmering water: the potential, especially if left unchecked, for religious unrest to “boil over” into outright conflict was always present from the start of the “New Immigration” to the United States from eastern and southeastern Europe around 1870 through its end in the 1920s.

Physical attempts to secure control within Roman Catholic parishes, such as riots, were often public events and so attracted much outside attention. Mainstream English-language newspapers regularly reported on such incidents in the form of articles or briefs, which were disseminated by national wire services. Unlike foreign-language “ethnic” newspapers, a wide range of historical English-language newspapers have recently been digitized and made searchable via vast online databases such as *Early American Newspapers* and *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers* (Library of Congress). Keyword searches in such databases turn up hundreds of acts of collective and individual militancy in Catholic communities. The dissection of such acts into components such as location, participants and their goals and tactics, origins and results, allows for their comparison across time and space. By treating them as “incidents of unrest” – events that are not isolated, but instead indicate underlying unrest within particular communities – seemingly discrete acts of militancy help lead to the discovery of particularly troubled Catholic communities. Perhaps not surprisingly, many such communities eventually saw schism, often after years of unrest.

2.2 REPORTING CONFLICT IN CATHOLIC AMERICA

The Associated Press, founded in 1846 when five New York City newspapers joined forces to cover the Mexican-American War, expanded during the American Civil War (1861-1865) and the Spanish-American War (1898) in order to meet the growing demands of newspaper readers for immediate and detailed reporting. The rise of newspaper chains and wire services, in combination with developments in printing technology, facilitated the spread of “new journalism” in the United States in the late nineteenth century.⁵ Characterized by new standards of objectivity, “new journalism” was approached by major newspaper publishers as a form of action (i.e., to identify and combat social problems including political and big business corruption). In an effort to increase readership, especially among the rapidly expanding working class, newspapers across the United States lowered prices, dropped allegiances to political parties and embraced new identities as independent sources of objective news. The fair and impartial reporting style of the *New York Times*, which provided an alternative to sensational newspaper reportage, set the standard for twentieth-century American journalism.⁶ Because of the rise of newspaper chains and wire services as well as a growing trend toward objectivity in American journalism in the late nineteenth century, mainstream English-language newspapers provide data about conflicts in American Catholic history.⁷

⁵ For more on the development of “new journalism” in the United States see Ted Curtis Smythe, *The Gilded Age Press* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003) and Richard L. Kaplan, *Politics and the American Press: The Rise of Objectivity, 1865-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁶ See W. Joseph Campbell, *The Year That Defined American Journalism: 1897 and the Clash of Paradigms* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁷ In contrast, foreign-language newspapers, or the “ethnic press,” were rarely unbiased in their reportage, were not disseminated by national wire services and were restricted by language to a limited number of readers.

In 1878, the headline “A Church Row” would not seem unusual to a regular reader of the *New Orleans Times*, nor would the reporting of a riot in a Roman Catholic parish in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, a small coal mining town more than one thousand miles away.⁸ Likewise, a North Dakotan, via the *Bismarck Tribune*, could learn of a similar incident in Winona, Minnesota, where five hundred angry Catholics, “with the American flag flying and their pockets full of cobblestones” were brought to the brink of riot outside the jail where their parish’s chairman was being held on charges of “inciting a riot” in 1894.⁹ In 1885, the *Wheeling Register* (West Virginia) reported on the death of two men during a church riot in Toledo, Ohio, a few days after an attempt was made to dynamite the church and one year after someone else was killed as part of a long-running feud between factions within the parish.¹⁰ In Texas, the *Dallas Morning News* reported on a convention of Polish Catholics in 1894 in Cleveland, Ohio, which attempted to organize several Independent Catholic parishes into an “American Catholic” church.¹¹ Because newspapers across the United States regularly printed sensational stories about immigrant Catholics and their riotous activities, Texans perhaps would not have been too surprised to learn of an attempt to organize schism in Ohio. After all, Ohio was geographically located in the middle of Catholic immigration and conflict in the country. Texas, on the other hand, although home to the oldest Polish settlement in the United States, Panna Maria (est. 1854), was far from the hotspots of conflict in Catholic America.

⁸ “A Church Row,” *New Orleans Times* (New Orleans, LA), July 7, 1878.

⁹ “St. Stanislaus Church Row,” *Bismarck Tribune* (Bismarck, ND) Aug. 17, 1894.

¹⁰ “A Riot in a Church,” *Wheeling Register* (Wheeling, WV), June 29, 1885.

¹¹ “Polish Catholics,” *Dallas Morning News* (Dallas, TX), Aug. 22, 1894.

Starting in the late 1870s and continuing well into the twentieth century, the *New York Times* regularly printed reports of conflicts in Catholic communities in Illinois, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania. Thus, a regular reader could learn of conflict within Catholic communities pretty much anywhere with significant concentrations of new European immigrants. The newspaper's most detailed articles traced conflicts in New York City's own immigrant Catholic communities, most notably, Saint Stanislaus Bishop and Martyr Roman Catholic Church (Polish) in the Lower East Side, Manhattan. For example, in 1879, the newspaper reported how, when Polish Roman Catholics bought a former synagogue and sought to organize Saint Stanislaus, the bishop, Cardinal John McCloskey, refused to dedicate the building. New York City's first Polish ethnic Roman Catholic parish was established in the midst of conflict: the founding members' chosen priest was accused of fraud, arrested and held on \$950 bail before the church even celebrated its first Mass. According to a *New York Times* article, a parishioner granted Rev. Francis Wayman power of attorney in order to collect \$180 from the parish trustees; however, he spent the money against his parishioners' wishes. He had done this in addition to failing to repay a \$500 loan granted by another parishioner. Saint Stanislaus's somewhat scandalous origin forecast much unrest to come in the parish, well beyond the tenure of its first pastor.¹² Interestingly, Saint Stanislaus's second pastor, Rev. Wojciech Mielcuszny, was transferred to Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Church (Polish) in Chicago, where, after a long-running and bitter feud with neighboring parish Saint Stanislaus Roman Catholic Church (Polish), and faction-fighting within his own parish, he was most likely murdered in 1881.

¹² "A Polish Priest in Trouble," *New York Times*, March 23, 1879.

In 1907, the *New York Times* aptly described headline-grabbing Polish immigrant Catholics as follows: “Probably no other religious sect whatsoever does so much in its church relations to enliven the newspapers. The procedures of the Polish faithful with unpopular pastors are good for a story every few weeks in the press.”¹³ In this particular article, the *New York Times* reported on how disaffected Catholics in Cleveland, Ohio, marched to Bishop Ignatius Horstmann’s house in order to personally demand that he reinstall their previous pastor. This article perhaps reminded readers of an earlier incident in New York City when members of Saint Stanislaus marched to Cardinal McCloskey’s residence in order to personally demand that he retain their pastor, whom several members had wanted to be removed.¹⁴ The archbishop did not meet with the mob that day, but, through a representative, successfully put off dealing with them. The *New York Times* covered the controversy that surrounded one priest, including an incident when parish trustees locked him out of the church building in July 1881.¹⁵ Likewise, the newspaper reported on threats made against a different priest in 1889 (“A Priest Threatened”); legal actions taken by parishioners to gain possession of the church from Archbishop Michael Corrigan in 1894 (“Law Vs. Ex-Communication: Church Authorities Defied by Polish Catholics”); and struggles between parishioners and yet another priest in the mid-1890s (“Threats Backed by Pistol: Exciting Episode in the Fight in St. Stanislaus”).¹⁶

Regardless of whether or not they lived near high concentrations of Catholic immigrants, Americans had, in the mainstream English-language press, access to

¹³ “Polish Catholics,” *New York Times*, Sep. 26, 1907.

¹⁴ “Petitioning the Cardinal,” *New York Times*, July 18, 1881.

¹⁵ “Defying the Cardinal,” *New York Times*, July 25, 1881.

¹⁶ “A Priest Threatened,” *New York Times*, May 22, 1889; “Law Vs. Ex-Communication,” *New York Times*, Jan. 24, 1894; “Threats Backed by Pistol,” *New York Times*, Jan. 24, 1894.

evidence from which they could form opinions of their country's newest residents. For example, in Macon, Georgia, residents could read reports from national wire services printed in the *Macon Telegraph* about how parishioners in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, locked their priest out of their church, sparking a riot in 1878.¹⁷ They could read about how mobs of angry Catholics surrounded their ousted priest's residence in 1885 in Detroit and how the priest's supporters demanded the bishop return him to his post.¹⁸ In 1887, they could read about the resignation of Archbishop Casper Borgess in Detroit and his troubled tenure, wracked by conflict "especially with the French and Polacks."¹⁹ They could read about an incident in a Roman Catholic cemetery in Washington, Pennsylvania, in 1890, where Lithuanian and Polish parishioners came to fisticuffs over burial rights, and how, according to the article, "The coffin was upset and the body rolled out."²⁰ The *Macon Telegraph* also reported on riots in Buffalo, New York, in 1890, in which Catholic women fought like "enraged tigers" and threw salt and pepper into the eyes of policemen who were at the church to protect a new priest to whom many parishioners objected.²¹

The church riot in March 1895 in Omaha, Nebraska, which opened this chapter, was reported most extensively in the *Omaha World Herald*. The violent and exciting incident, in which a priest exchanged gunfire with his enemies inside Saint Paul Roman Catholic Church (Polish), was also reported in the *New York Times*, as well as other papers published, distributed and read far from Omaha, such as the *Patriot* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania), *Idaho Statesman* (Boise) and *The Record Union*

¹⁷ *Macon Weekly Telegraph* (Macon, GA), July 16, 1878.

¹⁸ "Trouble in a Catholic Church," *Macon Telegraph* (Macon, GA), Dec. 3, 1885.

¹⁹ "A Catholic Bishop Resigns," *Macon Telegraph* (Macon, GA), May 4, 1887.

²⁰ "Fought Over a Grave," *Macon Telegraph* (Macon, GA), Jan. 21, 1890.

²¹ "Women Whip the Police," *Macon Telegraph* (Macon, GA), Feb. 3, 1890.

(Sacramento, California). Troubles starting in 1885 in Saint Albert's Roman Catholic Church (Polish) in Detroit, centering around the controversial figure of Rev. Dominic Kołasiński, were reported in a wide range of newspapers, including the *New York Times*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Kansas City Star* (Missouri), *New Haven Register* (Connecticut), *Macon Telegraph* (Georgia), *Wheeling Register* (West Virginia), *Wisconsin State Journal* (Madison) and *Salt Lake City Tribune* (Utah). In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported on conflicts in numerous immigrant Catholic communities, including in Detroit and elsewhere in Michigan, the Pennsylvania cities of Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Scranton and Reading, as well as in New York City, Chicago, Buffalo (New York), Baltimore and Toledo (Ohio).

Headlines about conflicts in Catholic America printed in mainstream English-language newspapers were fairly straightforward descriptions of events. A modern-day reader unfamiliar with the frequent militant quality of conflict in Catholic America, however, may find them quite sensational. For example, newspaper headlines described the 1895 church riot in Omaha as follows: "Assaulted in the Pulpit;" "Riot in the Polish Church;" "A Fight Follows Mass;" "Wild Scene in a Church;" "Battle in Church;" and "Church Garrisoned."²² In Minnesota, newspapers printed reports of church riots ("Bitter Church War" and "Drove Priest Out"), attempted murder ("Shooting at a Priest") and murder ("Suspect Held for Murder of Priest").²³ In Chicago, newspapers reported faction-fighting within parishes and "rebellion:" "Chicago Polish Catholics in

²² "Assaulted in the Pulpit," *Herald* (Los Angeles, CA), March 13, 1895; "Riot in the Polish Church," *Omaha World Herald* (Omaha, NE), March 13, 1895; "A Fight Follows Mass," *New York Times*, March 13, 1895; "Battle in Church," *St. Paul Daily Globe* (St. Paul, MN), March 13, 1895; "Church Garrisoned," *St. Paul Daily Globe* (St. Paul, MN), March 14, 1895.

²³ "Bitter Church War," *Scranton Tribune* (Scranton, PA), Aug. 17, 1894; "Drove Priest Out," *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, MN), July 15, 1894; "Shooting at a Priest," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Oct. 12, 1886; "Suspect Held for Murder of Priest," *Lexington Herald* (Lexington, KY), April 3, 1921.

Open Rebellion,” “A Priest in Peril: The Polish Catholic Troubles in Chicago Break Out Afresh,” “Rebellion in a Church” and “An Old Church Feud Renewed: Fears of Riot Between Two Polish Catholic Congregations.”²⁴ In Ohio, newspapers reported on the activities of angry Catholics: “Feud in a Church: Discordant Polish Catholics Ruthlessly Engage in Murder,” “Bishop’s House Besieged: 5,000 Angry Polish Parishioners Demand Return of Former Priest” and “A Riot in a Church: The Polish Catholic Church Turned Into a Battle Ground – Two Men Killed.”²⁵ Similar headlines appeared in reports from St. Louis, Missouri (“Riot Because of Pastor”), Baltimore (“An Intruding Priest Arrested: Trouble in a Polish Roman Catholic Church in Baltimore”), Milwaukee (“Poles Oppose the Bishops”), New York City (“Three Women Guilty of Assaulting Pastor” and “Try to Kidnap a Priest”) and Massachusetts (“Parishioners Beat Priest”).²⁶

In the mainstream English-language press, troublemaking Catholics were described as rebels, malcontents and belligerents. They stirred up rebellion against their pastors and bishops, against whose authority they were in open rebellion. They revolted. Enemies of priests and bishops fought against their religious leaders. They made demands of them. Most often, they demanded that a priest resign or that a bishop remove him. Riots, or near riots, were described as disturbances, fights and outbreaks.

The words “again” and “another” often appeared in articles as qualifiers, such as

²⁴ “A Priest’s Dictation: Chicago Polish Catholics in Open Rebellion,” *New York Times*, Sep. 26, 1888; “A Priest in Peril: The Polish Catholic Troubles in Chicago Break Out Afresh,” *New York Times*, Sep. 4, 1889; “Rebellion in a Church,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jan. 9, 1890; and “An Old Church Feud Renewed: Fears of Riot Between Two Polish Catholic Congregations,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jan. 6, 1891.

²⁵ “Feud in a Church: Discordant Polish Catholics Ruthlessly Engage in Murder,” *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, MN), June 22, 1894; “Bishop’s House Besieged: 5,000 Angry Polish Parishioners Demand Return of Former Priest,” *New York Times*, Sep. 23, 1907; “A Riot in a Church: The Polish Catholic Church Turned Into a Battle Ground – Two Men Killed,” *Wheeling Register* (Wheeling, WV), June 29, 1885.

²⁶ “Riot Because of Pastor,” *New York Times*, Dec. 25, 1905; “An Intruding Priest Arrested,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 29, 1890; “Poles Oppose the Bishops,” *Omaha World Herald* (Omaha, NE), Jan. 14, 1901; “Three Women Guilty of Assaulting Pastor,” *New York Times*, Oct. 14, 1929; “Try to Kidnap a Priest,” *New York Times*, Aug. 3, 1909; “Parishioners Beat Priest,” *New York Times*, Oct. 22, 1906.

another outbreak and another fight. Above all, there was trouble in Catholic America. Newspaper stories of religious conflict often read like serials. No single incident of unrest was ever an isolated occurrence; it was always part of a larger story. The phrase “to be continued...” was very much implied. After police quieted a rebellious community, newspapers often reported that although unrest had died down, it was only temporary: many articles ended with the phrase “trouble is anticipated” and noted that more arrests are expected.

Major conflicts in Catholic America that attracted in-depth national newspaper coverage, such as in Detroit in the mid-1880s and in Omaha, Nebraska, in the mid-1890s, were frequently described in headlines as wars or battles: “The Detroit Church War” (*New Haven Register*, Connecticut), “Polish Catholic Mob: The Religious War in Detroit Breaks out Fiercely” (*Wheeling Register*), “Battle in Church: Polish Catholics in Omaha Indulge in a Sensational Riot” (*St. Paul Daily Globe*) and “Battle After Mass” (*Omaha Daily Bee*).²⁷ In addition to attention-grabbing headlines, writers used militaristic language to describe religious conflicts in the text of their articles: “The congregation of the Polish Roman Catholic Church at this place are at war again,” read the *New York Times* in 1885; “a fierce battle took place in which pistols, stones and clubs were used,” read the *Macon Telegraph* in 1890; and “for months a species of undeclared warfare has raged,” read the *New York Times* in 1894.²⁸

The sensational word riot appears most frequently in newspaper headlines for articles about religious conflicts: “Rioting in Church,” read the *Daily Inter Ocean*

²⁷ “The Detroit Church War,” *New Haven Register* (New Haven, CT), Dec. 3, 1885; “Polish Catholic Mob,” *Wheeling Register* (Wheeling WV), Dec. 27, 1885; “Battle in Church,” *St. Paul Daily Globe* (St. Paul, MN), March 13, 1895; “Battle After Mass,” *Omaha Daily Bee* (Omaha, NE), March 13, 1895.

²⁸ “Fought Over a Grave,” *Macon Telegraph* (Macon, GA), Jan. 21, 1890; “At Odds with Their Priest,” *New York Times*, Aug. 24, 1885; “Bloodshed in a Church Riot,” *New York Times*, May 28, 1894.

(Chicago) in 1876; “Riot at a Polish Catholic Church,” read the *Sun* (Baltimore, Maryland) in 1883; “A Religious Riot,” read the *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana) in 1887; “Riot in a Catholic Church,” read the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1890; “Bloodshed in a Church Riot,” read the *New York Times* in 1894; and “Religious Riot at Scranton,” read the *Patriot* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) in 1911.²⁹ As intentionally dramatic public events that often embroiled entire communities, church riots, by design, attracted much outside attention. Catholics chose to riot; they did not just happen to riot. Often, they planned to riot or anticipated its possibility and thus were prepared to riot. Sometimes, conflicts did break out into battles and did include use of weaponry as distraught parishioners, and even priests, armed themselves in preparation for heated confrontations with the potential to turn into battle.

2.3 COLLECTIVE MILITANT STRATEGIES: PRIEST LOCKOUTS, MOB ACTIONS AND RIOTING

Lay Catholics sought to secure control within their parishes, most of all, at the expense of their priests. When priests would not comply with their desires, or at least compromise, parishioners frequently saw their removal as the quickest and surest way to restore proper order. Lay Catholics were likewise motivated to act in the hope of precipitating the reinstallation of a beloved priest who, in their eyes, was wrongly deposed. However, they had no power to fire or hire priests. Try as they might to influence their bishops – and they did often try – who would serve as their priests was

²⁹ “Rioting in Church,” *Daily Inter Ocean* (Chicago, IL), Sep. 16, 1876; “Riot at a Polish Church,” *Sun* (Baltimore, MD), July 23, 1883; “A Religious Riot,” *Times Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), March 21, 1887; “Riot in a Catholic Church,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jan. 27, 1890; “Bloodshed in a Church Riot,” *New York Times*, May 28, 1894; “Religious Riot at Scranton,” *Patriot* (Harrisburg, PA), June 12, 1911.

ultimately not up to them. Knowing this, lay Catholics often petitioned bishops in order to remove or install particular priests. However, they learned from experience that this diplomatic strategy was likely to yield neither swift nor favorable results. Anxious to hasten the change they desired to see within their parishes, lay Catholics strategically combined diplomatic tactics with militant ones. The most prevalent militant strategies were confrontational and often gave rise to violence such as rioting. Through acts of collective militancy – such as priest lockouts, mob actions and rioting – lay Catholics actively and strategically sought to secure control within their parishes.

Regardless of the end goal – the removal or reinstallation of a priest – immigrant lay Catholics used similar militant tactics across America in their battles for control. One widely used tactic was the priest lockout, which involved literally locking a priest out from his parish church. Priest lockouts were not public calls for peace talks, but instead more like showdowns between opposing factions long poised for combat. They often, intentionally or inadvertently, sparked rioting. The frequent occurrence of priest lockouts in American Catholic history shows that lay Catholics were willing not only to confront their priests, but also to physically fight against or in support of them. In doing so, they knowingly risked bodily injury and, sometimes, their own lives.

Priest lockouts were, most often, strategically staged on Sundays. Usually early in the morning, before the priest was expected to arrive, disaffected parishioners would chain shut and put their own lock on the front doors of the church building. Then, sometimes armed, sometimes not, they would wait for the priest to arrive. Parishioners did not hesitate to confront their priests, which they well knew might lead to riot, on the Sabbath. Strategically, Sunday was the best day of the week to confront

troublesome pastors and perhaps spark a riot. First, the priest was obligated to say Mass on Sundays. Therefore, he could not easily avoid his disgruntled parishioners by cancelling services, since doing so might get him into trouble with his bishop. Second, Sunday services attracted the largest number of worshippers who were obliged to attend for spiritual as well as social and communal reasons. Third, fewer people worked on Sundays, thus permitting the maximum number of local residents, whether parish members or not, to observe the drama that a lockout would certainly precipitate, and perhaps even join in a riot should one result. The public nature of a priest lockout was intentional: even if it did not lead to a priest's compliance with his parishioners' demands, at least it would increase the community's awareness of a particular conflict within a parish. In short, strategically staging a priest lockout on a Sunday would guarantee the largest audience for parishioners' public confrontation of their priest and the largest number of participants in any ensuing outbreak of violence.

In labor disputes, lockouts generally were a weapon of employers, not employees. In a lockout, management would prohibit employees to work unless they accepted certain conditions, thus ensuring their control of labor dispute settlements. By locking out workers, management publically demonstrated their ownership of the workplace. Strategically used most often against unionized workers, the number of lockouts rose nationally as did the number of strikes in the last couple decades of the nineteenth century.³⁰ Overall, the lockout was an effective tool wielded exclusively by management to end labor disputes in their favor. Considering the hierarchical structure of the American Roman Catholic Church, it would seem that bishops and priests would

³⁰ David Montgomery, "Strikes in Nineteenth-Century America," *Social Science History*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Winter 1980): 92.

function much like management. However, in parish-level conflicts, priest lockouts were a weapon of the laity, not the clergy. Locking out the priest was a blatant demonstration of parishioners' ownership of not only the church building, but also the entire parish. By locking out their pastor, parishioners signaled their dominance over him to the entire parish and the greater community. In a lockout situation, the message to the priest was clear: he would not say Mass, much less enter the church, without all of his parishioners' permission. The message to the parish and the community was also clear: the parishioners held authority over their pastor.

Lay Catholics needed little to convince them of their status as owners of their parishes. To them this was apparent: those who paid for the church owned the church. First- and second-generation immigrants organized, built and funded the maintenance of the churches in which they worshipped, the schools to which they sent their children and the residences in which their spiritual leaders resided. Even if they did not regularly attend religious services, the frequent sight of church buildings, priests and parish school teachers would remind parishioners of the financial sacrifice they made toward the spiritual good of their community. To assist a parish's growth was a source of much pride for working-class immigrant Catholics who, in their own homes, had little to show for their labor in the New World. To them, there was no question not only who owned parish property, but also who controlled it.

Lay Catholics staged priest lockouts as reminders to priests of who, according to their parishioners, really controlled parish property and finances. One parish-level conflict in the small coal-mining town of Dupont, Pennsylvania (near Scranton), exemplifies the militant nature of the priest lockout tactic employed in battles for

control within Catholic America. “One Dead, Two Dying After Church Riot,” read a front-page headline in the *New York Times* on January 17, 1916, continuing, “Pennsylvania State Troopers Charge Into a Mob of 1,000 Persons. Scores Badly Injured. Stones, Mustard, and Pepper Flung at the Police – Many Rioters Arrested.”³¹ Like many church riots that erupted from priest lockouts, the one in Dupont was neither spontaneous nor planned. More accurately, it was anticipated. In opposition to their new pastor, Rev. Francis Kurkowski, hundreds of members of Sacred Heart of Jesus Roman Catholic Church (Polish) gathered to bar his entry to the church. Both sides of the conflict came prepared: Kurkowski with a police escort and parishioners with, according to one source, “cartloads of stones” placed in “a certain mathematical precision” and “stacked in methodical order” in the churchyard.³² Almost everyone was armed and anticipating the riot: “Some carried mine-steaks, some crow-bars, some pick-axes, some oaken clubs studded with spikes. Some grasped lone ‘two-by-fours,’ through whose ends were driven new steel nails so that the sharp shafts stood out, firm and far, like the prongs of a long-tooth rake...The yard was a sea of yelling heads.”³³ When Kurkowski arrived some supposedly shouted: “We paid for this church ourselves. Our church. No one gets in but us. You get the hell out of here!”³⁴ “You can kill me where I stand,” one woman reportedly screamed directly at a state trooper, “but I’ll stay here till you do.”³⁵

³¹ “One Dead, Two Dying After Church Riot,” *New York Times*, Jan. 17, 1916.

³² Katherine Mayo, *Mounted Justice: True Stories of the Pennsylvania State Police* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1922), 219.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 217.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

Roman Catholics often fought for control within their parishes with extreme intensity. According to one report of the Dupont church riot: “The rioters, male and female, fought like the Mad Mullah’s fanatics – like homicidal madmen – like a pack of hydrophobic wolves, while their leaders howled them on.”³⁶ This struggle ended with the arrest of seventy-one people, two hospitalized, one dead and the organization of a Polish National Catholic Church – Holy Mother of Sorrows.³⁷ Another source describes the incident as follows: “Bits of hair, scalp and blood flowing into the cellar and spattered on the metallic fence around the church were mute evidence of the brutal police ‘round up’, all too reminiscent of the tyranny and the savagery of their European oppressors.”³⁸ Although the riot brought “sadness and even despair” to the community, “The present Polish community in Dupont,” reads the parish’s entry in a PNCC anniversary book, “thanks God that He opened their eyes and gave them the opportunity to better know Christ and the obligations of Poles to God, their community and their homeland, Poland.”³⁹ Supposedly, a cross long marked the spot where one parishioner was shot dead by a state trooper.⁴⁰

In another parish-level conflict far from Dupont, lay Catholics in St. Louis, Missouri, similarly locked out a newly assigned pastor in order to prevent him from starting his tenure in December 1905. By doing so, members of Saint Casimir Roman

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 229. Sayyid Mohammed Abdullah Hassan, nicknamed “Mad Mullah,” led a resistance movement against British, Italian and Ethiopian forces in Somalia for nearly 20 years in the early 20th century. Mayo’s comparison of the rioting Catholic immigrants in Dupont with this Somali religious and nationalist leader would have been quite effective among her contemporary readers, since her book was published just two years after Hassan’s death.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 241-242.

³⁸ *Rola Boża/Przebudzenie/God’s Field: Bishop Franciszek Hodur: 1866-1966*, 19.

³⁹ *Po Drodze Życia W 25-ta Rocznicę Powstania Polskiego Narodowego Katolickiego Kościoła w Ameryce, 1897-1922* (Scranton, PA: Polish National Catholic Church, 1922), 108.

⁴⁰ Matthew S. Fliss, “The Development of the Church at Dupont, Pennsylvania,” *PNCC Studies* 14 (1993): 95.

Catholic Church (Polish) intended to signal to Archbishop John Glennon that his choice of pastors was unsatisfactory. The lockout was successful: Glennon withdrew the rejected priest and appointed another. According to the *New York Times*, Glennon's submission to lay Catholics' demands was "Contrary to the usual custom," but was done "through a desire to propitiate the congregation."⁴¹ In contrast to lay Catholics' initial success in St. Louis, most priest lockouts did not bring about satisfactory results for their instigators, because bishops tended to firmly stand behind the priests they appointed. Instead, priest lockouts tended to escalate conflict within Roman Catholic parishes, frequently leading to an explosion of violence. Not surprisingly, Saint Casimir parishioners also rejected Glennon's second appointment to their parish. A riot broke out after a meeting held to strategize how to get rid of the new priest. According to the *New York Times*, it took "a wagonload of police" to end the fighting; seven people were arrested and two officers were assigned to guard the church.⁴²

A priest's attempts to wrest control of parish finances and property from his parishioners was certain to cause conflict and, perhaps, lead to his lockout. For example, trustees of Saint Joseph Roman Catholic Church (Polish) in Camden, New Jersey, refused to turn over parish funds as demanded by their newly appointed pastor in 1894. Arriving home after finding the church doors locked one evening, the priest was met with, according to the *New York Times*, an "angry mob, which shouted demands that he leave the city."⁴³ Immigrant lay Catholics saw their rejection of an unsuitable priest, especially those who demanded more control, as within their rights as members of the Roman Catholic Church in America. They dismissed priests, often

⁴¹ "Riot Because of Pastor," *New York Times*, Dec. 25, 1905.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ "Father Dynio Not Persona Grata," *New York Times*, Feb. 28, 1894.

via democratic means such as a vote of confidence, and only afterward asked the bishop to send a replacement. In 1900, trustees of Saint Rocco Roman Catholic Church (Italian) in Newark, New Jersey, voted to dismiss their pastor. In response to the priest's refusal to hand over the church keys and Archbishop Winand Wigger's refusal to send a replacement, the trustees' lawyer padlocked the church doors. The priest's supporters, who agreed with him that he, not the trustees, controlled church property, busted the lock and retook the church building.⁴⁴

Similarly, in 1883, in Nanticoke, Pennsylvania, Rev. Beneventus Gramlewicz found the doors of Saint Stanislaus Roman Catholic Church (Polish) locked upon his arrival for Mass one Sunday morning. After he tried to force open the doors, according to the *New Haven Register*, "a rough-and-tumble fight ensued" and the priest was "hustled into the street."⁴⁵ Having earlier appealed to Archbishop William O'Hara to remove Gramlewicz in a petition with five hundred signatures, disaffected parishioners grew tired of waiting for a reply and so took action against their intolerable priest.⁴⁶ According to them, Gramlewicz could not account for \$4,000 in missing church funds and, even more appallingly, verbally abused his parishioners from the pulpit.⁴⁷ In response to his lockout, Gramlewicz had warrants issued for the arrest of several parishioners for, according to the *New York Times*, "rioting and disturbing the peace."⁴⁸ Perhaps being motivated by the riot to finally act, the newspaper reported, O'Hara met with Gramlewicz and "exonerated him."⁴⁹ Not surprisingly, the conflict continued. It

⁴⁴ "Police Guard a Church," *New York Times*, Nov. 29, 1900.

⁴⁵ "Fighting a Priest," *New Haven Register* (New Haven, CT), Oct. 1, 1883.

⁴⁶ "Angry Parishioners," *New York Times*, Oct. 2, 1883.

⁴⁷ "Fighting a Priest."

⁴⁸ "Angry Parishioners."

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

was not until 1899, however, that Nanticoke Catholics broke away from the Roman Catholic Church and organized a PNCC parish, which, due to strong opposition by the Roman Catholic Church, was forced to reorganize in 1905.

From the pulpit, Gramlewicz chastised his parishioners for their drinking and for local saloons keeping Sunday hours. According to the *New York Times*, he told “his congregation that it was insult to their God for them to spend the Sabbath in saloons, loafing and drinking.”⁵⁰ Interestingly, a dispute over alcohol sparked perhaps the very first instance of conflict in a Polish ethnic Roman Catholic parish in the United States: starting in 1868, five different pastors of Saint Joseph Roman Catholic Church (Polish) fought with neighboring local saloon owners in Poland Corner (Polonia), Wisconsin. In 1870, Rev. Joseph Dąmbrowski threatened to resign if parishioners would not rebuild the church away from the saloons. Supporters of the saloon owners threw rocks at workers taking down the church and filed charges against Dąmbrowski and Archbishop Joseph Melcher for loss of business. Violence broke out in the midst of the conflict: in one incident, someone placed logs filled with gunpowder in Dąmbrowski’s woodpile. In defiance of the priest and the bishop, disaffected parishioners organized an Independent Catholic church, building on the spot of the old church. Like many schisms, the church soon closed (in 1894) and members returned to the Roman Catholic Church.⁵¹

Verbal abuse was a sure way for a priest to gain the ire of his parishioners. Besides using the pulpit to chastise people for drinking, pastors also publically attacked those who sought to minimize pastor control of parish finances and property. Such talk

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Anthony J. Kuzniewski, *Faith and Fatherland: The Polish Church War in Wisconsin, 1896-1918* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), 24-25.

could escalate unrest within parishes, which was also spurred on by lay Catholics through angry letters to priests, sometimes threatening bodily injury, even death. For example, on a Sunday in February 1892 in Reading, Pennsylvania, Rev. Marek Januszkiewicz read an unsigned letter criticizing his leadership of Saint Mary Roman Catholic Church (Polish) from the pulpit during Mass. With confidence, he identified the writer as a “chicken thief.” Simon Baranowski, a parishioner recently convicted and jailed for stealing chickens, stood up and loudly defended himself: Yes, he did steal chickens, yet he had since paid for each one. According to the *New York Times*, Baranowski yelled “vile epithets in Polish” at Januszkiewicz, who ordered him to be removed.⁵² More than two hundred men and women shot up from the pews and quickly took sides, “a regular Kilkenny row” broke out, and hymnals flew across the sanctuary.⁵³ Baranowski was thrown out of the church into the yard where, the *New York Times* reports: “the crowd set upon each other again, knives, stones, razors, and brickbats being used with telling effect.”⁵⁴ Thirty people were arrested later that day.⁵⁵ Thirty-five years later, after many more incidents of unrest within Reading’s Catholic community, several members of Saint Mary left the Roman Catholic Church and organized Saint Stephen, the First Martyr, PNCC.

Bishops regularly appointed new pastors to ethnic parishes in hopes of a remedying parish-level unrest or to prevent a diocesan-level conflict should a potentially troublesome (for the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy) priest become too

⁵² “Free Fight in a Church,” *New York Times*, Feb. 8, 1892.

⁵³ *Ibid.* The term “Kilkenny row” is used here to evoke images of brawling and, possibly, drunken Irishmen for the reader who may be more familiar with such stereotypes of Irish immigrants than with that of Polish immigrants.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

popular. A bishop's replacement of a beloved pastor, however, had potential to spark conflict within a Roman Catholic parish. For example, in 1890, in Buffalo, New York, Archbishop Stephen Ryan removed Rev. Anton Klawiter from Saint Adelbert Roman Catholic Church (Polish). Many of Klawiter's former parishioners were not shy of expressing their discontent with the bishop's action, even going so far as to send a delegation to Rome to protest. One day, early in the tenure of Klawiter's replacement, the former pastor's supporters removed everything from the parish school and rectory and locked it up in the church.⁵⁶ The new pastor, Rev. Pawler, attempted to say Mass in the unlocked parish school, but few attended. A crowd gathered around the building and demanded that those inside leave. According to a newspaper report, of the three who refused to vacate the school, two were dragged out and one fled, fearing for his life.⁵⁷ Pawler was escorted out of the building by police, and Mass was cancelled. The following week, Archbishop Ryan ordered Pawler to say Mass. Having requested police protection, Pawler was escorted to the church, according to the *Macon Telegraph*, "by a cordon of armed detectives, while patrolmen marched to the church with batons drawn."⁵⁸ A wild scene resulted, which included, according to the newspaper, twenty-five hundred women fighting "like enraged tigers" and throwing salt and pepper into police officers' eyes.⁵⁹ In attempts to strangle the priest, women jumped on Pawler: they

⁵⁶ "Almost a Riot," *Patriot* (Harrisburg, PA), Jan. 27, 1890.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ "Women Whip the Police," *Macon Telegraph* (Macon, GA), Feb. 3, 1890.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

“scratched, bit, struck, kicked and yelled like so many cats.”⁶⁰ Police quickly whisked the priest away from the dangerous scene amidst “a volley of curses, excitations and the vilest of declarations and expletives and scandalous charged in Polish.”⁶¹

In many Catholic communities, newly appointed priests, like Pawler, found themselves the coincidental victims of lay anger toward a bishop who deposed the previous and beloved pastor. Lay Catholics often saw unwanted replacement priests as the pawns of the bishop and, therefore, proper objects of their frustration and, sometimes, outright fury. In such instances, popular priests might disregard their bishop and start their own parish. For example, in 1900, the *New York Times* reported on a “lively row” sparked “over the possession” of Saint Mary of Carmel Roman Catholic Church (Polish) in Bayonne, New Jersey.⁶² The parish’s deposed priest, after forming a new church with his supporters, took actions to “gain possession” of his former parish by, simply, entering the open church and locking the doors. According to the article, news of the church’s repossession motivated five hundred people, supporters of the deposed priest and of his replacement, to flock to the church.⁶³ A riot ensued in the excitement: “Fists and sticks were used freely” until police arrived and quieted the uproar “with the aid of their nightclubs.”⁶⁴

Bishops did not regularly appear at parishes in their dioceses. If lay Catholics wanted to confront their bishops, they had to take their grievances to them. Most often, they would write the bishop and try to arrange meetings between him and lay representatives. Sometimes, they would take more militant actions, such as marching

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² “Poles Fight for a Church,” *New York Times*, June 24, 1900.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

right to the bishop's residence. By doing so, parishioners would strategically escalate their intra-parish struggle to the level of the diocese. For many parishes, such confrontations were not feasible, given the distance to the diocesan headquarters. However, many parishes, especially urban ones, did confront their bishops in this way. In the bishop's eyes, such acts were done in direct defiance of his authority. According to parishioners, they had a right to at least hand him their demands in order to see that he actually received them. They usually did so having already tried and failed to involve the bishop in their conflicts through more diplomatic strategies, such as letter writing and petitioning.

In September 1907, five thousand disaffected Catholics besieged the residence of the Roman Catholic archbishop of Cleveland, Ohio, Ignatius Horstmann. According to the *New York Times*, some of the demonstrators were dressed "in the uniforms of various church and military organizations."⁶⁵ It was the second time lay Catholics organized a march on the bishop's residence in the past six months; the *New York Times* described the incident as a "siege."⁶⁶ The long-running unrest within Saint Vitus Roman Catholic Church (Polish) also included a stoning of the rectory. Demanding he reinstall their previous pastor, the mob served the bishop an ultimatum: either he meet their demand by the end of the week or "ten thousand of us, aggrieved, will bivouac before the [episcopal] residence and no one will move in or out."⁶⁷ This was not an isolated incident. Rather, it was the latest development in what the *New York Times*

⁶⁵ "Bishop's House Besieged," *New York Times*, Sep. 23, 1907.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

called the “warfare” in which the parish had been embroiled for the past six months.⁶⁸ According to the newspaper report, the congregation “seems to have been thoroughly unionized.”⁶⁹

On Christmas Day, 1885, disaffected members of Saint Albert Roman Catholic Church (Polish) marched to Archbishop Caspar Borgess’s residence in Detroit, Michigan. They had recently gathered at the church, which had been earlier closed by the bishop during a conflict within the parish, mainly over the controversial and popular figure of Rev. Dominic Kołasiński. Having expected services to be held for the holiday, parishioners were more than disappointed to find the church still closed; they were furious. According to the *New York Times*, fifteen hundred to two thousand people marched to Borgess’s episcopal residence, but he snuck out the back, successfully avoiding confrontation with the mob.⁷⁰ Similarly, in July 1881, lay Catholics marched to Cardinal John McCloskey’s residence in New York City in order to personally ask him to restore their previous pastor. Finding him not at home, the mob continued onto the vicar-general’s house. A priest who answered the door accepted a petition from the mob but said that neither prelate was present.⁷¹ Bishops often successfully avoided getting too involved in any single parish-level conflict. Instead, they favored remaining aloof, hoping that conflicts would die down on their own.

Although particular militant acts were often spontaneous, the choice to adopt a militant disposition was often part of lay Catholics’ larger strategy to effect a certain change within a parish, such as the removal or reinstallation of a certain priest. At the

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ “Polish Catholics,” *New York Times*, Sep. 26, 1907.

⁷⁰ “An Ugly Mob in Detroit,” *New York Times*, Dec. 27, 1885.

⁷¹ “Petitioning the Cardinal,” *New York Times*, July 18, 1881.

heart of every conflict was the issue of control: lay Catholics, above all, acted to secure control of the administration of parish finances, property and employees (especially priests). Militant incidents of unrest were never isolated events; they never originated nor resolved a conflict. Priest lockouts, mob actions and rioting were outward expressions of unrest within a parish, not acts of desperation. Knowing their options for dealing with a troublesome priest in order to resolve a parish-level conflict, lay Catholics sometimes chose diplomatic tactics in addition to acts of collective militancy. Most rarely, they acted alone, in acts of individual militancy such as assault, death threats, killings and arson.

2.4 INDIVIDUAL MILITANT STRATEGIES: ASSAULT, DEATH THREATS, KILLINGS AND ARSON

Rev. Stephen Kamiński was not only armed the Sunday morning in March 1895 when he was accosted in his church by a mob of angry parishioners, but he also had quick access to several pistols and ammunition stored in the sacristy behind the altar.

Likewise, much of the community from the Omaha neighborhood surrounding Saint Paul was prepared to riot. The priest claimed that his enemies intended to take possession of the church one way or another: if not peacefully, then by force. Kamiński chose to escalate the situation; his enemies chose to answer gunfire with gunfire.

According to a newspaper report, Kamiński planned to ring the church bells to call his supporters to his aid if needed. Suspecting that he would refuse to leave the church peacefully, Kamiński's enemies earlier tied the bell rope to a fence, thus thwarting his

option to call for help.⁷² The *Omaha World Herald* described the scene: “The interior of the church around the altar, after the shooting, resembled a miniature battlefield.”⁷³ Kamiński explained his actions to the newspaper, justifying his armed rampage: “I had reason to believe my life was in danger, because I have received several threatening letters in which I was warned to leave the city at once or suffer death.”⁷⁴ In the end, Kamiński was arrested, along with several others, and the sanctuary was desecrated. Two weeks later, the church was burned to the ground, most likely by Kamiński’s enemies. It was never rebuilt. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Omaha disbanded the congregation, and Saint Paul was no more. In commenting on the incendiary fire, Kamiński said: “They have been plotting against me ever since I came here. They have tried to kill me, or drive me from the church.”⁷⁵

One function of acts of collective militancy in Catholic America was to raise public awareness of conflict within a parish. Riots and mob actions could catch the attention of the parish, the larger community and the press, as well as, hopefully, members of the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy. Lay Catholics strategically escalated conflicts in order to bring attention to their intra-parish strife. They often did so after writing to their bishop failed to result in any assistance. Sometimes, they used the possibility of riot as a threat. Less commonly, lay Catholics used militant tactics that were not so communal, including assault, death threats, killings and arson. Due to their smallness of scale, acts of individual militancy are more difficult to uncover in American Catholic history than those of collective militancy. Their use, however,

⁷² “Wild Scene in a Church,” *Idaho Statesman* (Boise, ID), March 13, 1895.

⁷³ “Riot in the Polish Church,” *Omaha World Herald* (Omaha, NE), March 13, 1895.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ “Polish Church is Burned,” *Omaha World Herald* (Omaha, NE), March 28, 1895.

demonstrates the great lengths many lay Catholics were willing to go in order to bring about the change they desired to see within their parishes. Kamiński's experience in Omaha was not unique. Priests embroiled in conflict with their parishioners did receive threats, including threats of bodily injury, even death. When threatening a priest failed to yield favorable results, distraught lay Catholics sometimes took actions in order to carry out their threats. Therefore, priests who were threatened like Kamiński prepared themselves for violent confrontation.

In 1886, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Rev. Ladislaus Miskiewicz, according to the *New York Times*, received a letter “threatening to blow up his house with dynamite or end his life in some way.”⁷⁶ The newspaper reported that Miskiewicz's opposing faction in Saint Adalbert Roman Catholic Church (Polish) in Pittsburgh's Southside neighborhood claimed that the priest “armed his female supporters with knives with which all the Hussars [parish society opposed by Miskiewicz] are to be assassinated on Sunday morning.”⁷⁷ Regardless of whether this was true or not, even the rumor of such a brutal and violent attack in response to an anonymous threat exemplifies that lay Catholics were aware of the serious nature of challenging a priest's authority. Miskiewicz, like Kamiński, honestly felt his life to be in danger; however, he would not flee, but stay and fight, if necessary. One Sunday morning, a few months after the first threats were made on the priest's life, a bullet passed through a church window into the sanctuary during Mass. According to the *San Francisco Bulletin*: “women screamed, the choir boys shouted.”⁷⁸ Miskiewicz, interestingly, “showed great coolness,” even though,

⁷⁶ “War in a Polish Settlement,” *New York Times*, June 12, 1886.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*; Full name of the parish society: Polish Hussars of John III, Sobieski.

⁷⁸ “A Bullet Fired into a Polish Church Causes Great Excitement,” *San Francisco Bulletin* (San Francisco, CA), October 11, 1886.

according to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*: “If it [the bullet] had been fired a minute soon it would have passed through him.”⁷⁹ Five years later, Miskiewicz’s house was besieged by a mob, motivated by anger at his removal of a beloved assistant priest, and unrest continued in the parish into the summer of 1892.

In 1909, a Newark, New Jersey, priest was shot dead in his home by three assassins, who also shot the priest’s housekeeper. According to the *New York Times*, the pastor of Saint Stanislaus Roman Catholic Church (Polish) received numerous death threats after deposing the parish’s board of trustees.⁸⁰ The “friends” of the trustees and the parish fund collectors, also deposed by the priest, sided with the trustees, thus causing a factional split within the parish. Angry parishioners initially urged other church members to stop contributing to parish funds and appealed to Bishop John O’Connor for the priest’s removal. After the bishop denied their request, the priest’s enemies tried to intimidate him with threatening letters, then ultimately carried out his assassination. The priest was shot twice in the side and once in the back by bullets fired from three different guns, including a Luger semi-automatic pistol. According to the *New York Times*, five thousand people gathered outside the rectory on the night of the killing: “The scene was one of the wildest grief. Women became hysterical with weeping, and men raged.”⁸¹

In May 1894, a woman was found dead with a crushed skull on the street in Cleveland, Ohio. According to her priest, the Independent Catholic leader Rev. Anton Kołaszewski, she was murdered for divulging to him plots to take his life.⁸² According to

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* and “Shooting at a Priest,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Oct. 12, 1886.

⁸⁰ “Newark Priest Slain by Three Assassins,” *New York Times*, March 11, 1909.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² “Feud in a Church,” *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, MN), June 22, 1894.

one newspaper report, the man who confessed to her his hiring to murder the priest was shortly thereafter found “charred to a cinder” in the burned ruins of a local Polish-owned print shop.⁸³ The situation in Cleveland, a hotbed of unrest in Catholic America, especially during Kołaszewski’s era, was not typical. However, it is significant to note that murder was not outside the options lay Catholics might consider in their efforts to effect the change they desired to see within their parishes. For example, the *Duluth News-Tribune* (Minnesota) reported on the attempted murder of Rev. Anton Kozłowski, an Independent Catholic Church leader in Chicago in 1901.⁸⁴ In 1907, the *Patriot* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) reported on the priest’s sudden death, possibly by poison.⁸⁵ Two years prior to Kozłowski’s demise, again in the *Duluth News-Tribune*, readers could learn of the attempted murder of Rev. Stephen Kamiński, an Independent Catholic Church leader in Buffalo, New York.⁸⁶ Various newspapers across the United States, including the *Columbus Daily Enquirer* (Georgia), *Grand Forks Herald* (North Dakota), *Lexington Herald* (Kentucky) and *State* (Columbia, South Carolina) likewise printed reports of the priest’s brush with death. In 1911, after Kamiński died, readers of the *New York Times* could read about how “thousands” of the priest’s enemies rushed his funeral procession in Buffalo in an attempt to upset his casket.⁸⁷

Leaders of sizable Independent Catholic movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw multiple attempts made on their lives. Several died early in the existence of their Independent churches, all of which either collapsed with their deaths or eventually merged with the PNCC: Rev. Dominic Kołasiński died in 1898, at

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ “To Kill a Bishop,” *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, MN), Sep. 1, 1901.

⁸⁵ *Patriot* (Harrisburg, PA), Jan. 16, 1907.

⁸⁶ “Attempt to Kill Bishop Kaminski,” *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, MN), Feb. 13, 1905.

⁸⁷ “Attack Bishop’s Funeral,” *New York Times*, Sep. 25, 1911.

age sixty-two, thirteen years after his schism in Detroit; Rev. Anthony Kozłowski died in 1907, at age fifty, twelve years after his schism in Chicago; Rev. Stephen Kamiński died in 1911 in Buffalo, New York, at age fifty-two, sixteen years after his schism; and Rev. Anthony Kołaszewski died in 1910 in Cleveland, Ohio, at age fifty-nine, sixteen years after his schism. Kołasiński and Kołaszewski both reconciled with the Roman Catholic Church before their deaths; Kozłowski and Kamiński did not. The fact that PNCC founder Rev. Francis Hodur led his movement for over fifty years until his death in 1953, at the age of eighty-seven, seems an anomaly in the history of schism in Catholic America.

2.5 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF LAY MILITANCY AND “DISOBEDIENCE”

In Polish, the word *duszpasterz* is a combination of the words *dusza* (soul) and *pasterz* (pastor, i.e., shepherd).⁸⁸ In other words, a *duszpasterz* is not simply a pastor of his parishioners, but, more precisely, of their souls. In this Polish understanding of the vocation of pastor, the *duszpasterz*'s primary concern is, ideally, the salvation of his parishioners' souls. When parishioners question the actions of their *duszpasterzy*, they question their pastors' very fitness to oversee their personal salvation. The act of challenging one's pastor, therefore, was a serious one. Lay Catholics understood the risks they took by acting to remove a troublesome priest (e.g., refusal of sacraments, excommunication, ostracism from their community, etc.). They also understood the risks they took by tolerating a priest they deemed unsuited for the ministry. The high frequency of conflict in American Catholic history shows that lay Catholics were deeply

⁸⁸ *Pasterz* an archaic word for *pastor* (same spelling in Polish as in English).

motivated to seek the control they desired within their parishes. To them, having a pastor who permitted an agreeable amount of lay control was essential to their personal salvation, which was only possible within the Roman Catholic Church.

Scholars have long noted the respect eastern European Catholics, especially the Poles, held for priests. In their seminal sociological study, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, 1918-1920*, published at the height of conflict in American Catholic history, William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki describe the Polish Roman Catholic parish as “a kind of great family whose members are united by a community of moral interests.”⁸⁹ The priest is the “father of the parish,” whose duty it is, as “a representative of God (Jesus),” to “[maintain] the moral order” of the parish.⁹⁰ Late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century members of the hierarchy and clergy of the American Roman Catholic Church would have certainly agreed with this description. However, members of the laity have shown through their actions that, even if they agreed with this description, doing so did not ensure their obedience to Church authorities. When acting “in his religious, official character,” Thomas and Znaniecki explain, the priest’s “superior morality” is assumed. They continue: “Therefore also his teaching, his advice, his praise or blame, whenever expressed in the church, from the chancel, or in the confessional, are listened to as words of Jesus, seldom if ever doubted, and obeyed more readily than orders from any secular power.”⁹¹ A thorough study of

⁸⁹ William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, Volume 1 (New York: Octagon Books, 1974), 275. Originally published 1918-1927.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

conflict in Catholic America, which reveals a laity which frequently doubted and disobeyed its priests, challenges this one-hundred-year-old claim, which continues to influence American Catholic history today.

Since “the priest is a representative of the parish in acts of worship,” Thomas and Znaniecki explain, “it results that all his religious actions are supposed to be performed in the name of the community, and he is socially bound to perform them conscientiously and regularly.”⁹² If the basis of the parish is, in Thomas and Znaniecki’s words, “the idea of a moral unity of the human society,” then a priest who cannot satisfactorily lead his parishioners threatens not simply the unity, but, more precisely, the moral unity of his community.⁹³ In other words, a priest who fails to perform his pastoral duties at a level acceptable to his parishioners not only fails his community, but also threatens his community. Therefore, a troublesome priest is a problem with which the whole community must deal. This understanding is reflected in the reality that lay Catholics rarely acted individually to remove priests; the effort to do so was almost always communal and often pursued via democratic means. When immigrants did strike, they did so out of concern for their community. Likewise, when lay Catholics organized, made demands of their priests and bishops and took action to see to the fulfillment of those demands, they did so out of a concern for their community’s spiritual welfare.

Scholars of Polish-American history agree on the centrality of the Roman Catholic parish in Polish immigrant communities in the United States and Canada. Just as in the Old Country, the parish was the site of, in Thomas and Znaniecki’s

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 275.

words, “the most important events of individual, familial, and communal life.”⁹⁴

Sacraments and rites performed in the parish would mark important moments in the lives of community members as well as affirm their Catholic faith. At baptism, individuals began their Christian lives in the parish; after death, they were buried in the parish cemetery following a funeral Mass in the church. “The most intense feelings are connected with the place,” write Thomas and Znaniecki, “which is therefore surrounded with a nimbus of holiness, is an object of awe and love.”⁹⁵ Although it was a new creation – not simply transplanted from the Old Country to America, nor successfully duplicated – the American Roman Catholic parish was, at least, something very familiar in an otherwise strange, new world.⁹⁶ The local parish was also, significantly, a source of much pride for the community. Thomas and Znaniecki explain: “Building and adorning the church is one of the manifestations and the most evident symbol of the solidary activity of the parish for the glory of God. At the same time a beautiful church satisfies the aesthetic tendencies of the peasant, gives an impressive frame for religious meetings, and strengthens the feeling of awe and the exaltation which all the religious ceremonies provoke.”⁹⁷

Although written nearly a century ago, Thomas and Znaniecki’s work reflects the dominant narrative of the history of Polish Catholicism still alive today. Written in 1918-1920, *The Polish Peasant in Europe in America* provides a contemporary, in-depth sociological examination of the immigrants who passionately fought for control within their parishes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The devout and

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 276-277.

⁹⁶ John Radzilowski describes the Polish-American parish as a “new creation” in “A Social History of Polish-American Catholicism,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 27, no. 3 (2009): 28.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 276.

obedient Polish Roman Catholic, which Thomas and Znaniecki describe in their work, is so often invoked in American and European histories that it is a cliché. For example, Paul Fox describes Polish Roman Catholics as follows: “The Poles are a very religious people, possessed of a deep religious instinct and a temperament particularly susceptible to religious impressions. Religion permeated the Polish peasant’s thought, speech, and daily life. The names of Christ and the Virgin are on his lips all the time. His legends and folklore are religious in character. His patriotism and his religion are inseparably linked together in his mind. A good Pole is expected to be a good Catholic.”⁹⁸ Although these words were written nearly one hundred years ago, they do not sound archaic. Such perceptions of Poles’ special brand of Catholicism have continued to influence modern scholarship.

The widespread and common occurrence of parish- and diocesan-level conflict adds nuance to the concept of devoutness for which Polish Catholics are famous. A focus on conflict among American Catholics reveals a laity that not only questioned priests and bishops, but also directly challenged their authority. Thomas and Znaniecki use the term “patriarchal government” to describe pastoral oversight of their parishes: priests held “complete, if not absolute control of all aspects of parochial life, both in spiritual and social dimensions.”⁹⁹ In their battles to secure control within their parishes, lay Catholics did not seek to change Roman Catholic Church doctrines or rituals; they sought to lessen the social control priests held over their parishes. In the context of the United States, immigrant lay Catholics began to question their priests. Particularly,

⁹⁸ Paul Fox, *The Poles in America* (New York: George H. Doran, 1922), 107.

⁹⁹ Casimir J. Wozniak, *Hyphenated Catholicism: A Study of the Role of the Polish-American Model of Church, 1890-1908* (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1998), 55.

they questioned the way they controlled their parishes and their parishioners.¹⁰⁰ As pastors, priests were to be shepherds of their flock or parish. The actions lay Catholics frequently took to challenge their pastors' and bishops' authority challenge this simplistic understanding of the clergy-lay relationship. Evidence shows that lay Catholics did not always mindlessly follow their priests like sheep. Yes, priests and bishops were understood to be God's representatives on earth. But, they were human representatives and, therefore, able to err.

Simply questioning a priest's authority, nonetheless challenging it, could result in his refusal to offer the sacraments. In extreme circumstances, such disobedient actions could lead to excommunication. This grave possibility was real and serious. To be excommunicated was to be spiritually cut off from the only vehicle for salvation – the Roman Catholic Church. Typically, excommunication from the Roman Catholic Church in America was reserved for schismatic priests and their followers. However, bishops strategically used the threat of excommunication not only to warn lay Catholics of the risks of disobedience, but also to scare off even any thoughts of disobedience. By circulating orders of excommunication with instructions for priests to read them to their parishioners from the pulpit, bishops made the dire consequences of disobedience and rebellion widely known. This practice was not always limited to the diocese within which an excommunication occurred; sometimes orders to publicize sentences of excommunication were circulated nationally. No doubt, the readings of such sentences were accompanied by stern words from priests who had likely experienced challenges to their authority within their own parishes.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

In the heat of conflicts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, bishops and priests frequently threatened to excommunicate disobedient lay Catholics. For example, in 1883, a priest in Nanticoke, Pennsylvania, threatened to excommunicate the troublesome members of his congregation. The *New Haven Register* reported: “his threats were disregarded.”¹⁰¹ In 1886, the *New York Times* reported, “Quite a number of rebellious members were excommunicated” from Saint Prokop Roman Catholic Church (Polish) in Cleveland, Ohio.¹⁰² In an 1894 article reporting a court case to decide the legitimate owners of Saint Stanislaus Roman Catholic Church (Polish) in New York City, the *New York Times* described the heated conflict as follows: “Threats of excommunication have been flying thick and fast.” The parishioners’ lawyer told the paper: “You tell the Archbishop and his priests that if they attempt to excommunicate you for acting under the laws of this State we will go into the Supreme Court and get an injunction restraining them from putting you under the ban. Then, if they excommunicate you, we will have them locked up for contempt of court. Even the Archbishop of this diocese is amenable to the laws of the State.”¹⁰³ Working-class immigrant lay Catholics did not take the threat of excommunication lightly. The extreme actions that many of them took to secure control within their parishes show that they believed that achieving their goals was worth the risk.

¹⁰¹ “Fighting a Priest,” *New Haven Register* (New Haven, CT), Oct. 1, 1883.

¹⁰² “A Church Quarrel Averted,” *New York Times*, Jan. 5, 1886.

¹⁰³ “Law V. Ex-Communication,” *New York Times*, Jan. 24, 1894.

2.6 CONCLUSION

Lay men and women most desired to secure control of the administration of parish finances, property and employees (especially priests). In particular, they sought to limit priests' power to meddle in matters they deemed to be part of the temporal sphere of parish life. Overall, as long as priests fulfilled their parishioners' desires for an acceptable level of control within their parishes, conflict could be avoided. However, it is only partly thanks to the many priests who were willing to compromise with their parishioners and thus prevent conflict that American Catholic history, as we imperfectly know it, is relatively conflict-free. Without conflict, our understanding of American religious and immigration history is not only incomplete, but also inaccurate. It is only through discovering and piecing together hundreds of incidents of unrest from outside sources that the contours of this history become clearer and its significance becomes apparent.

Almost all conflict within Catholic America included some degree of militancy. Most often, such strategies were collective: including priest lockouts, mob actions and rioting. More rarely, they were individual: including assault, death threats, killings and arson. Lay Catholics' use of both types of militant strategies reflects the seriousness with which ordinary lay men and women took conflicts within their parishes and dioceses. By engaging in such militant activity, lay Catholics knowingly risked physical, psychological, social and material "injuries." However, the ultimate goal of their use of militant strategies – to secure control within their parishes – was often worth the risk. For many lay Catholics, especially those who engaged in acts of militancy in the battle for control within Catholic America, a certain amount of lay control was best for their

Church and their own spiritual well-being. Hence, contrary to popular thinking, late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century immigrant lay Catholics often disobeyed Roman Catholic Church authorities. They did so strategically and, from their perspective, justifiably.

Just as Catholics strategically used both acts of militancy and the threat of militant actions so too did priests and bishops strategically work to prevent the occurrence of rioting. Not surprisingly, reports of militant incidents of unrest in the mainstream English-language press helped to exacerbate the negative opinions many native-born Americans held for Catholics. Many Protestant Americans already had questioned whether Catholics could be good citizens in American democracy well before the mass migration of Catholics from eastern and southeastern Europe in the late nineteenth century. Members of the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy did not desire to facilitate the greater public's prejudice of Catholics by allowing members of the laity to publically stage acts of militancy such as priest lockouts and riots. It was to members of the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy's advantage to resolve conflicts before collective militancy could break out or, far worse, schism could occur. Roman Catholic priests and bishops, however, were remarkably inept at diplomatically negotiating with demanding and, in their eyes, disobedient lay people.

CHAPTER 3

DIPLOMATIC STRATEGIES

On a summer Sunday morning in 1878, several excited parishioners, armed with crude weapons, gathered outside of Saint Casimir Roman Catholic Church in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania. Having chained shut the church doors, the incensed crowd intended to prevent the priest of their mixed Polish/Lithuanian parish from saying Mass that morning. A riot ensued upon Rev. Alexius Lenarkiewicz's arrival, resulting in the arrest of thirty men and women. *The New York Times* claimed that the crowd attacked the priest with "stones and clubs" and, had it not been for the intervention of police, would have killed him on the spot.¹ In *The Catholic Herald*, the quarrelling parishioners claimed that he fought them off while wielding "a large bunch of keys" as a weapon. They defended their actions, writing, "Every Christian should stick up for his religion, and we should live as brothers, not clubbing and kicking at each other like dogs."²

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Intensely fighting for control within their parishes, lay Catholics often literally did club and kick at each other. In their battles to secure the control they sought within their parishes, lay Catholics frequently made use of militant strategies including priest lockouts, mob actions and rioting. Mapping incidents of unrest in American Catholic

¹ "Mobbing of a Catholic Priest," *New York Times*, July 8, 1878.

² Newspaper clipping, *Catholic Herald* (Shenandoah, PA), July 18, 1878, Wood Collection, 51.349Con, Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center (hereafter PAHRC), Wynnewood, PA.

history uncovers new, conflict-ridden dimensions which challenge the dominant perspective of lay Catholics as those who “pray, pay and obey.” Knowingly risking physical, psychological, social and material “injuries,” lay Catholics strategically disobeyed Roman Catholic Church authorities. Making use of a range of strategies – militant, diplomatic, legal and schismatic – lay Catholics actively sought to shape their parishes to best fit their spiritual needs in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century immigrant America.

In addition to militant strategies, lay Catholics frequently made use of diplomatic strategies in their battles for control within their parishes, including: petitioning and writing to bishops, cardinals and popes, electing representatives to meet with members of the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy and publishing open letters in English-language newspapers defending their actions. Such strategies were not diplomatic in that they did not involve two equal parties: lay Catholics initiated communications with exalted prelates in a rigid hierarchical Church within which they knowingly occupied the lowest level. They were diplomatic, however, in that they were strategically tactful, judicious and delicate. Diplomatic strategies, unlike the militant strategies examined in chapter two, were nonaggressive and nonconfrontational; they were sincere attempts at peaceful conflict resolution. By communicating their troubles to Roman Catholic prelates, lay Catholics consciously attempted to escalate their parish-level conflicts to the diocesan and, sometimes, international level. In such communications, lay Catholics carefully articulated their struggles in order to evoke the sympathy of those men in the Roman Catholic Church who had the power to grant their requests.

Working-class immigrant lay Catholics regularly described their troubles in good English and politely made demands to Roman Catholic prelates via letters and petitions for which they collected pages of signatures. Frequently, they sought permission to establish a new parish. Most often, they sought the removal of a troublesome priest or the reinstallation of a beloved one recently dismissed. In their writings to bishops, cardinals and sometimes to the pope himself, lay Catholics strategically described their troubles and proposed solutions in terms of language and ethnicity. In reality, priests' attempts to wrest control of parish finances and property from their parishioners, not their language incompetency or cultural incompatibility, formed the primary cause of parish-level unrest across Catholic America. Lay Catholics, however, knew that members of the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy would not sympathize with their desires to secure control within their parishes. They therefore strategically emphasized reasons for discontent that did not conflict with developments in the nineteenth-century Church, which further centralized power within the office of the bishop at the expense of the laity.

From lay Catholics' perspectives, they approached their diplomatic efforts by following proper protocol. They regularly elected representatives within their parish, or, more accurately, within their faction inside their parish. Such representatives frequently took the form of a board of trustees or a committee and included a president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary. In addition to dozens, and sometimes hundreds of signatures, petitions to Roman Catholic prelates were frequently signed by individuals who identified themselves as, for example, "Trustees," "Board of Trustees," "The Committee," "On Behalf of Committee" and "For Petitioners." Lay Catholics often

wrote to members of the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy not as individuals, but as representatives of their parish. Far from seeing their actions as a form of disobedience, lay Catholics at least initially viewed their diplomatic efforts as serious attempts at conflict resolution.

This chapter closely examines the immigrant Catholic community of Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, and one priest-centered conflict that embroiled the community for over a dozen years starting in 1877. In Shenandoah, as elsewhere, lay Catholics' use of diplomatic tactics rarely led to swift corrective action. The archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia, James Frederick Wood, ignored the many repeated requests he received to remove Rev. Lenarkiewicz as well as those to permit the establishment of a new "Lithuanian" ethnic parish. In such parish-level conflicts, members of the Church hierarchy typically threw their full support behind the parish priest, as did Wood support Lenarkiewicz. Sometimes, bishops acted against lay Catholics by, for example, forwarding petitions to the very priests the lay people wanted removed. In Shenandoah, and elsewhere, priests used this information to accost their enemies, calling them "bad Catholics" and accusing them of disobedience and even rebellion. Priests like Lenarkiewicz often defended themselves by dismissing their opponents' claims as false and attacking their credibility. Not surprisingly, such actions tended to cause conflicts to escalate. As described above, a riot broke out in the churchyard of Saint Casimir in the summer of 1878. In 1879, nearly two and half years after the start of the conflict, parishioners changed their demands from a new priest to a new parish altogether. In their diplomatic attempts to control their parish, and

ultimately their spiritual destiny, Shenandoah lay Catholics did not directly attack their priest, but instead strategically justified their demand for his removal in terms of language and ethnic differences.

3.2 SHENANDOAH, PENNSYLVANIA

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, America's newest immigrants typically settled in areas where they believed employment would be most readily found. This included both large urban areas as well as smaller, yet highly industrialized, rural areas, like Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania. Situated amongst rolling hills of green wilderness below the Appalachian Mountains in eastern Pennsylvania one hundred miles northwest of Philadelphia, Shenandoah was such an industrialized coal-mining town.³ Coincidentally situated at the southern tip of what was once the most productive and lucrative anthracite coal seam in the United States, the exploitation of Shenandoah's natural resources fueled its swift growth at the end of the nineteenth century. Beginning in the 1870s, a steady influx of a few thousand immigrants from eastern and southeastern Europe transformed the small farming community into a sizable rural industrial hub of more than twenty-five thousand people by 1910.⁴

³ Shenandoah lies roughly halfway between Scranton (approximately 50 miles to its north) and Reading (approximately 50 miles to its south).

⁴ Shenandoah's landscape was dotted with large and small mines. According to an 1883 map of coalfields in the region – which included the nearby towns of Frackville, Girardville and Mahanoy City and the smaller communities of Gilbert Run, Maizeville, Mahanoy Place, Preston and New Boston – Shenandoah was surrounded by various elements of the mining industry, mostly owned by the Philadelphia and Reading Coal and Iron Company [*Shenandoah and Girardville Sheet, Schuylkill and Columbia Counties; Western Middle Coal Field Topographical Sheet No. II, AA Atlas v. 3 pt. 1 plate 6* (1883), Pennsylvania Geological Survey, 2nd Survey].

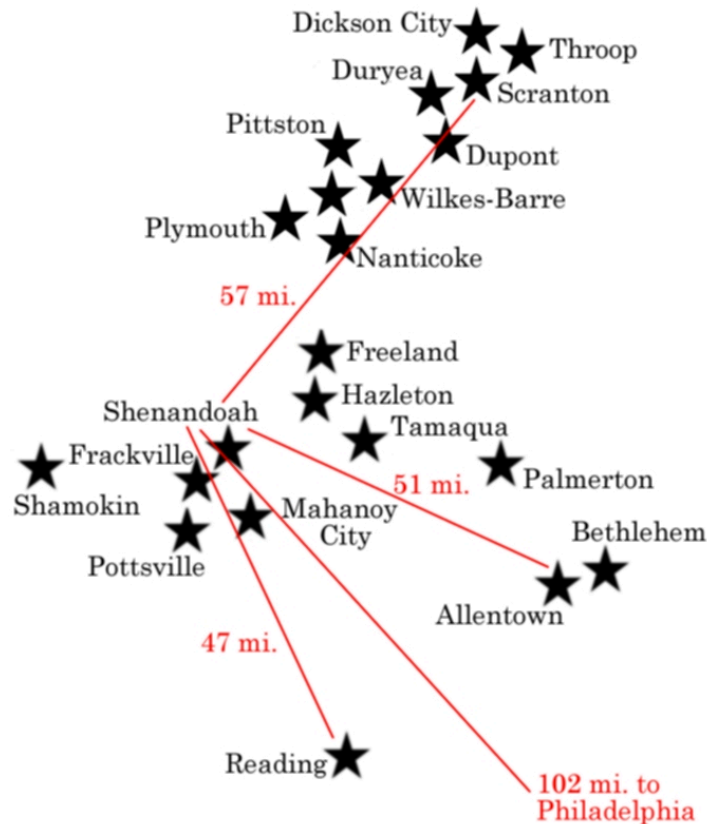


Figure 5. Shenandoah and Other Schism Locations in Eastern Pennsylvania

Although far from any cities, the town of Shenandoah itself looked quite urban. Among its grid-like streets lined with row houses, Roman Catholics tucked at least seven large church complexes: Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (est. 1870, Irish), Holy Family (est. 1872, German), Saint Casimir (est. 1872, Polish/Lithuanian), Saint George (est. 1891, Lithuanian), Saint Stanislaus (est. 1898, Polish), Saint Stephen Protomartyr (est. 1899, Slovak) and Our Lady of Mount Carmel (est. 1914, Italian); as well as three other Catholic churches: Our Lady of Mercy (est. 1880, Syrian Catholic), Saint Michael (est. 1884, Ukrainian Catholic) and Holy Ghost (est. 1922, Polish National Catholic). Shenandoah's periphery was sprinkled with patches of small

homes, mostly occupied by working-class immigrant Catholics who worked in the nearby mines and walked into town for Mass on Sundays. In his post-industrial study *Five Cities: The Story of Their Youth and Old Age*, George Leighton traces Shenandoah's history, which, he claims, "reflects the rise, power, and decline of a great industry."⁵ Describing Shenandoah in the mid-1930s, he writes: "Most acutely the traveler feels that he is standing on a battlefield, and that is almost an exact statement of the case. For seventy-five years [since 1861] this has been a battleground and it still is."⁶ In his study, Leighton examines the rise and fall of Shenandoah's coal industry. His description of the town as a battlefield, however, can be very much applied to its often troubled and troublesome Catholic community. As a religious battlefield, Shenandoah was exemplary of many Catholic communities, both rural and urban, in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century immigrant America.

Shenandoah's first non-Irish and non-German Roman Catholic parish, Saint Casimir, was established in 1872. In just five years, it would succumb to a fate common among America's ethnic parishes in the late nineteenth century: it became embroiled in an intra-parish dispute over the pastoral fitness of its priest. In 1877, the parish quickly split into factions upon the dismissal of its founding pastor, Rev. Andrius Strupinskas, and the arrival of his replacement, Rev. Józef Aleksy Lenarkiewicz.⁷ On

⁵ George R. Leighton, *Five Cities: The Story of Their Youth and Old Age* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1939), 9. Originally published in 1936.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷ According to one source, Strupinskas was dismissed as pastor of Saint Casimir for his use of the controversial Kneipp water treatment method in his amateur medical practice [William Wolkovich-Valkavicius, *Lithuanian Religious Life in America: A Compendium of 150 Roman Catholic Parishes and Institutions*, Vol. 2: Pennsylvania (Norwood, MA: Lithuanian Religious Life in America, 1996), 87.]. Lenarkiewicz was educated at a Carmelite monastery in Russian-ruled Poland until the January Uprising (against Russian rule) of 1863. Able to leave the country after the collapse of the Moscow government, Lenarkiewicz went to Rome as a subdeacon to finish his studies. He was ordained in 1865 and immigrated to the United States in 1867, at age 27. He worked at various Roman Catholic parishes for the next couple

one side were Lenarkiewicz's supporters; on the other were his opponents, who strategically presented themselves not as the priest's enemies or his predecessor's supporters, but as "Lithuanians." According to their opponents, Lenarkiewicz and his supporters were not "Lithuanian," but, quite differently, "Polish." The reality, in an era in the midst of the rise of modern nationalism, was more complicated. To describe the conflict within Saint Casimir in the 1870s/1880s as an "ethnic" dispute – Polish parishioners vs. Lithuanian parishioners – would be too simplistic. Lay Catholics who first desired to remove Lenarkiewicz and replace him with a Lithuanian-speaking priest and later desired their own ethnic Lithuanian parish, however, strategically described their troubles to outsiders in terms of language and ethnicity.

The faction-forming that took place within Saint Casimir was not uncommon in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century immigrant Catholic America. Lay Catholics often formed strong feelings for their parish priests, ranging from sincere adoration to utter disdain. Although most lay Catholics probably felt more or less neutral about their appointed spiritual leaders, those who did have such strong feelings were sometimes quite vocal. Such exceptionally motivated lay Catholics were liable to act when prodded to do so from such actions as the dismissal of a beloved priest or the continued employment of a despised one. In the case of Shenandoah, both actions took place: a well-loved priest, Rev. Strupinskas, was dismissed and replaced by an objectionable one, Rev. Lenarkiewicz. Lay Catholics, not just in Shenandoah but across

years, including in New York, Maryland and Kansas, before returning to Rome in 1869. In 1873, he briefly returned to New York City, before landing a more permanent position in the Diocese of Philadelphia in 1873. In 1877, Archbishop Wood appointed him pastor of St. Casimir in Shenandoah, PA.

America, knew that the power to appoint and dismiss priests lay primarily in the hands of the bishop of their particular diocese. It was to him directly that lay Catholics wrote and petitioned.

In a July 1877 letter to the archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia, James Frederick Wood, a committee representing the six-hundred-member congregation of Saint Casimir, “excepting about thirty persons, who are friends of the late Rev. Strupinski,” expressed thanks for Lenarkiewicz’s appointment.⁸ Describing their appreciation for Lenarkiewicz, “a gentleman, who reflects credit upon the cause of religion,” the letter-writers warned the archbishop: “We sincerely trust that any misrepresentations made to you, by the friends of Strupinski, may not be heeded by you.”⁹ The so-called “friends of the late Rev. Strupinski” began aggressively, though respectfully, agitating the archbishop for Lenarkiewicz’s removal soon after his arrival in Shenandoah. They repeatedly wrote and petitioned Wood throughout the rest of his tenure, which ended with his death in 1883, and continued their diplomatic efforts with his successor, Archbishop Patrick John Ryan. Although they were unsuccessful in removing Lenarkiewicz – he remained pastor of Saint Casimir until his death in 1904 – they were eventually successful in establishing a new parish – Saint George Roman Catholic Church (est. 1891, Lithuanian). Leaders of Saint Casimir’s “Lithuanian” faction built support for their cause by identifying themselves not as enemies of Lenarkiewicz or supporters of his predecessor, but as Lithuanians.¹⁰

⁸ Letter to Archbishop Wood from Sylvester Brozys, July 31, 1877, Wood Collection, 51.343Con, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.; “Strupinski” is the Polish version of the Lithuanian “Strupinskas.”

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ For the sake of brevity and clarity, I refer to the anti-Lenarkiewicz/pro-Lithuanian-speaking-priest/pro-new-Lithuanian-ethnic-parish faction in Saint Casimir Roman Catholic Church as the “Lithuanian” faction.

3.3 LANGUAGE

A 1938 history of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia does not mention the conflict which infected nearly the first half Lenarkiewicz's long tenure at Saint Casimir. The parish's founding under the direction of Strupinskas, "a native of Lithuania," and the building of a "new and beautiful church" in 1874 is followed by an account of Lenarkiewicz's many achievements.¹¹ Focusing on his tangible accomplishments, like the expansion of the church building into "one of the largest churches in Schuylkill County," the author of Lenarkiewicz's clerical biography describes the priest as a "pioneer" among the archdiocese's Poles and his contributions as "immortal."¹² He notes the courage Lenarkiewicz showed in "defense of his countrymen," which won him "deep respect," even among strangers.¹³ When news spread of his death, according to his biographer, the entire city of Shenandoah mourned. Countless crowds took part in his "majestic" funeral procession, including auxiliary bishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia Edmond Francis Prendergast.¹⁴ "Himself a refugee from his homeland," his biography reads, "Rev. Lenarkiewicz understood his countrymen well. He therefore was a caring and zealous priest who greatly contributed to the development of this archdiocese's first Polish parish."¹⁵ According not to this "official" history, but to many of his own parishioners, Lenarkiewicz's main trouble within Saint Casimir was exactly his inability to understand a significant portion of his

¹¹ *Historia Polskich Rzymsko-Katolickich Parafij Archidiecezji Filadelfijskiej* (Philadelphia, PA: 1938), 33.

¹² *Ibid.*, 235 and 236.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 235.

congregation. At least, that was the grievance many members of his parish strategically chose to emphasize to outsiders and used to justify their occasionally militant and even disobedient actions.

In August 1877, under the leadership of a few particularly motivated individuals, members of Saint Casimir's "Lithuanian" faction first petitioned Archbishop Wood for a new priest to replace Lenarkiewicz. This priest was, most importantly, to speak Lithuanian. With no reply after three weeks, four representatives of the faction wrote again: "We would again humbly call your attention to that petition and beg permission to remind your Lordship that there are a great many of us that cannot go to confession on account of not being able to speak the polish language."¹⁶ In other words, Lenarkiewicz's incompetence in Lithuanian had serious spiritual consequences for many of his parishioners. These consequences extended to the parish's Lithuanian-speaking children who "are deprived of religious instruction."¹⁷ Quite simply, according to the letter-writers, the language gap within the parish made it so that many parishioners "cannot perform our religious duties as we desire."¹⁸ The solution, they proposed, was apparent and simple: "make some change that will better our spiritual condition."¹⁹ In other words, replace Lenarkiewicz with a Lithuanian-speaking priest. Expressing reverence and respect for the archbishop, the letter-writers closed by writing: "We remain your humble and obedient sons in our Lord Jesus Christ."²⁰

¹⁶ Letter to Archbishop Wood from Mathias Staninas, Aug. 20, 1877, Wood Collection, 51.344Con, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

In Saint Casimir, Lenarkiewicz's competence in Lithuanian was more than a matter of debate; it was controversial. Although his language skills cannot be accurately assessed from extant historical sources, it is known that he was born far from any Lithuanian-speaking region.²¹ In the nineteenth century, Lenarkiewicz's hometown, the lakeside village of Giewartów, was in the voivodeship of Konin, which was then part of the Russian Empire.²² Most of Lenarkiewicz's opposition in Saint Casimir also had lived under Russian rule prior to emigrating, but further east and north, in a region that is part of modern-day Lithuania. More precisely, they were from the region around the town of Kražiai, located on the other side of the Russian exclave Kaliningrad from modern-day Poland. Lenarkiewicz's hometown was over four hundred twenty-five miles from Lithuania's medieval capital of Vilnius (Wilno). Therefore, it seems unlikely that he would have arrived in Shenandoah, at age thirty-seven, with much competence in the Lithuanian language. Polish-Lithuanian bilingualism, however, was not uncommon in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, even

²¹ According to an anniversary book of Polish parishes in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia, Józef Aleksy Lenarkiewicz was born on February 17, 1840 to a noble family in the Warsaw region [*Historia Polskich Rzymsko-Katolickich Parafij Archidiecezji Filadelfijskiej*, 235.]. In 1902, a priest in Poland confirmed his baptism in "the Roman Catholic Parish of Giewartow deanery of Slupca, County of Kalisz, Kingdom of Poland" [No label, Ryan Collection, 61.140XAcl, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.]. Giewartów today is in the voivodeship (province) of Wielkopolska (Great Poland), 150 miles from Poland's modern-day capital. More accurately, it is in the Poznań region, not the Warsaw region, as claimed in the diocesan history. Also incorrectly noted in the 1938 history, Lenarkiewicz was not born to a noble family. According to a 1904 report of the records of his family's parish in Poland, his grandfather died "a beggar," his father was illiterate, and only one his five siblings survived childhood and adolescence [Letter to the administrator of the Roman Catholic parish of Giewartow, Poland, Sept. 5, 1904, Ryan Collection, 61.126Acl, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.]. This discrepancy may be due to the curious fact that Lenarkiewicz died a rich man, leaving a fortune of \$86,000 (around \$2.2 million in today's dollars) and, problematically, no will [Letter to W. K. A. Perski from the Chancellor's Office, Archdiocese of Philadelphia, March 13, 1905, Ryan Collection, 61.127Acl, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.].

²² During the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1772, 1793 and 1795), Wielkopolska was annexed by neighboring Prussia. The region was partitioned again after the Congress of Vienna (1815): between Prussia and Russia (Congress Poland). The voivodeship of Konin, which included Giewartów, was incorporated into the Congress of Poland (Russian Empire). Poznań, Giewartów's closest major city, became Posen under Prussian rule and returned to Polish territory (as Poznań again) after World War I via the Treaty of Versailles (1919). Lenarkiewicz, therefore, was born in the Russian-ruled region of Poland, near the border with the Prussian Empire.

in the United States. This was true, partly because the terms “Polish” and “Lithuanian,” which can be used to describe the languages of Saint Casimir parishioners in the late nineteenth century, are not quite synonymous with the same terms used to describe the modern-day Lithuanian and Polish languages. Most likely, the “Polish” and “Lithuanian” languages spoken by Shenandoah residents from the Russian Empire were much more similar to each other than the official languages of the modern countries of Poland and Lithuania.²³

In 1864, following the failed January Uprising against the Russian occupation of 1863, the Latin alphabet was banned across the Russian Empire. Part of a larger Russification plan, the ban prohibited not only the printing but also the possession of publications in the Latin alphabet. The ban, as well as popular resistance to Russification, contributed to the deterioration of the quality of education among the Polish and Lithuanian peasantry. Since the ban was not lifted until 1904, members of Saint Casimir in Shenandoah in the 1880s were most likely poorly educated, including in their own native languages. Many late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century immigrant Roman Catholic priests spoke both Polish and Lithuanian, including Lenarkiewicz’s predecessor and a priest many parishioners wanted to hire to replace

²³ Lithuanian and Polish belong to the Balto-Slavic group of the Indo-European family of languages. Although both are written in a Latin alphabet (not Cyrillic), Lithuanian is a Baltic language, whereas Polish is a western Slavic language. In other words, the two languages are closely related, but not as similar as, for example, Polish and Slovak or Czech (also western Slavic languages). Since it is a Baltic language, and not a Slavic language, Lithuanian is not as intelligible to Polish-speakers as, for example, Ukrainian, Belarusian or Russian, which, although written in Cyrillic alphabets, are also eastern Slavic languages. The two languages, though geographically close, are not mutually intelligible today. Lithuanian is most closely related to Latvian, another Baltic language, which has even fewer native speakers.

him. Partially thanks to such bilingualism, the Roman Catholic Church in America had many mixed Polish/Lithuanian ethnic parishes like Saint Casimir in Shenandoah, the founders of which drafted its by-laws in both languages.²⁴

Archbishop Wood met with a delegation representing Saint Casimir's "Lithuanian" faction in September 1877. According to a letter written to Wood two months later, the delegation asked the archbishop for "a priest that could speak the Lithau language."²⁵ With their request unfulfilled after nearly two months, representatives of the faction wrote again to Wood. Apologizing for being "so troublesome," they expressed the urgency of their situation in spiritual terms: "We would humbly and respectfully represent to you that many of us are working in the mines and in danger of sudden death almost daily. In such cases a priest speaking our language is absolutely necessary to us, to administer the last sacrament of our holy church to us."²⁶ Not having a Lithuanian-speaking priest was not simply an inconvenience, the letter-writers hoped to convey to their archbishop: it was nothing short of a spiritual crisis.

In an 1878 telegraph, a woman begged Wood to send a Lithuanian-speaking priest. "In the name of Jesus," she wrote, "send us [the Lithuanian-speaking] pastor Konch [Koncz] from Baltimore. We are under death sickness. We don't know when God will send for them."²⁷ In another 1878 telegraph, a doctor informed Wood of the urgent need of a Lithuanian-speaking priest in order to minister to a man who "was

²⁴ Wolkovich-Valkavicius, *Lithuanian Religious Life in America*, 86.

²⁵ Letter to Archbishop Wood from John O. Leth and Peter Kozakawich, Nov. 3, 1877, Wood Collection, 51.346Con, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Telegraph to Archbishop Wood from Mary Boncewicz, 1878, Wood Collection, 51.348Con, Wood Collection, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

dangerously injured today.”²⁸ Since the man “cannot converse with the priest here,” referring to Lenarkiewicz’s incompetence in Lithuanian, the doctor asked for one to be sent who can communicate with him.²⁹ In January 1878, another representative of the “Lithuanian” faction, George Miller, informed Wood that “bad Catholics crazed with drunkenness and filled with every other passion with the Devil is capable of putting into Man’s mind and Soul” had destroyed the church gate and several windows one recent evening.³⁰ Miller explained the actions of the “bad Catholics,” writing that they were “made bad from want of approaching the Sacrament as Catholics ought to but alas cannot for want of a Pastor to instruct them in their religious duties and to hear their confessions.”³¹ In other words, without the spiritual guidance of a Lithuanian-speaking priest, people were acting out in violent ways. Warning the bishop of possible future false accusations against his constituents, Miller wrote: “you must must not be misled by any other account of which of course you will hear.”³²

Three weeks later, Miller, “On behalf of petitioners,” politely made a somewhat bold threat: “We once more ask Your Grace to send us a definite answer to our petitions before we proceed or have to appeal to a higher authority.”³³ Less than one month later, Miller, “On Behalf of Committee,” again wrote pleadingly: “Presuming once more on Your Grace’s attention we your oppressed children in Christ take the liberty of once more laying our grievances at your feet asking you in the name of that God who died for

²⁸ Letter to Archbishop Wood from George Miller, July 22, 1878, Wood Collection, 51.350Con, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA. The telegraph was also signed by George Miller.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Letter to Archbishop Wood from George Miller, Jan. 15, 1878, Wood Collection, PAHRCWood51.351Con, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Letter to Archbishop Wood from George Miller, Feb. 20, 1878, Wood Collection, 51.353Con, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

all on the cross to extend your charitable ear to our prayers and petitions.”³⁴ He explained how Lenarkiewicz had a parishioner he suspected of damaging the church “arrested and hurled off to prison there to await trial.”³⁵ Also, he wrote, Lenarkiewicz recently appeared in court in Pottsville and “swore that there were only two in his congregation who did not understand him.” To counter this “falsity,” Miller included with the letter “twenty one (21) affidavits taken before a competent Justice of Peace,” in which deponents swore they spoke only Lithuanian and could not understand Polish.³⁶ Miller also noted that the “Lithuanian” faction he represented could have easily provided Wood with more than one hundred such affidavits.

3.3.1 CONFESSION

In 1882, in order to convince Wood of Saint Casimir’s ongoing language problem (then entering its sixth year), several members of the parish again had statements about their language competence notarized and sent to the archbishop’s office in Philadelphia.³⁷ According to the notarized statements signed by two different self-identified “justices of peace” in Schuylkill County, many Shenandoah Roman Catholics simply could not communicate with their priest. The deponents ranged in age from twenty-one to fifty-three and had lived in Shenandoah from a couple months to twelve years. Each man swore that Lithuanian was his native language and that he spoke either no or very little Polish or English. As a consequence, each deponent stressed, he was not able to make an adequate confession. A couple men stated that they did make

³⁴ Letter to Archbishop Wood from George Miller, March 24, 1878, Wood Collection, 51.354Con, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ There are fifteen total extant statements made by twenty people, all men.

confession to Lenarkiewicz, but, due to his incompetence in Lithuanian, had disappointing experiences. One statement reads: “the Confession was so unsatisfactory to deponent that he did not desire to go to him [Lenarkiewicz] again;” another claims that due to Lenarkiewicz’s inability to “speak or use deponent’s native language,” confession “affords him very poor satisfaction.”³⁸ Most deponents, however, did not even try to give confession. According to them, the main obstacle to their access to confession was, according to one statement, that “Father Lanerkawicz [sic] can not talk or minister to his people in the Lithuanian language.”³⁹

All fifteen extant notarized statements were dated May 29, 1882, seven weeks after Easter Sunday. Since the statements were made after Easter, it seems as though the deponents tried, and mostly failed, to make their Easter confessions. In one statement, two deponents claimed that they attempted to make their confessions “within four weeks ago.”⁴⁰ One deponent specifically mentioned his desire “to go to Easter Confession,” but Lenerkiewicz refused to hear it in Lithuanian and, according to the statement, “sent this deponent away without confession.”⁴¹ Aware of their religious duty to make confession during the seasons of Lent and Easter (precisely the six weeks prior to and the eight weeks following Easter), deponents expressed their strong desire to make their confessions in their statements. For example, one twenty-five-year-old man stated that he “greatly desired to have the privileges benefits of the Church administered to him in his native language, viz., Lithuanian.”⁴² Two men concerned about following the “rules of their Catholic Church” described confession as a “yearly

³⁸ No label, Wood Collection, folder 53.177-53.185Acl, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

duty.”⁴³ Another man stated that he “never could make his confession according to the rites of the catholic church in his own language as he can speak no other language.”⁴⁴

One man, having lived in Shenandoah for ten years, noted that not only could Lenarkiewicz not hear his confession, but also could not hear those of his “wife and family.”⁴⁵

In nearly half of the statements, deponents claimed that Lenarkiewicz had demanded \$10 in order to hear their confessions. A few men stated that they could not afford to pay \$10, at least not all at once, so they offered instead \$5. Lenarkiewicz refused to accept \$5, even if given with a promise to later pay another \$5. According to one statement, Lenarkiewicz responded to one man’s complaint of the “exorbitant amount of money” by ordering him “to go to hell.”⁴⁶ It seems somewhat unlikely that Lenarkiewicz was simply asking for a payment for his services of administering confession. The men who made these statements may not have been church members in good standing. It is quite possible that they were not even members of Saint Casimir, but sought to make confession out of feelings of religious duty, which were heightened during Lent and Easter. Lenarkiewicz, by asking for \$10 to hear confession, may have been trying to get fringe Roman Catholics to commit to parish membership.

In their communications to Archbishop Wood, Lenarkiewicz’s opponents emphasized reasons for their discontent which they knew the prelate would agree were valid. A priest indeed needed to be able to understand the language of his parishioners in order to properly hear their confessions, otherwise, he would simply be guessing

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

what the penance for their confessed sins may be and whether their contrition deserved absolution. In the Roman Catholic Church, penance is a sacrament. As such, it is a way for Catholics to confirm their faith as well as their status as members of their parishes. Traditionally, Roman Catholics from eastern and southeastern Europe went to confession at least once per year in order to prepare themselves to take Communion at Easter. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries this was customarily done in preparation for that central Christian event. In many ethnic parishes, especially Polish and Lithuanian parishes, membership was annually confirmed via confession during the seasons of Lent and Easter. Parishioners who were heads of their household would receive “tickets” for Easter confession, for themselves and their entire family, if they had paid their yearly church dues. Otherwise, they could not make confession and would thus lose their status as a parish members in good standing.⁴⁷ Confession, therefore, partly functioned as a tool of the clergy: it was a way to maintain church membership as well as to collect tithes. Falling into a liminal status within the parish could cause a person to suffer not only spiritual anxiety, but also a decline in his family’s social standing within the community. Confession, therefore, carried monetary (for the parish), spiritual and social significance.

⁴⁷ See Mary Cygan, “Ethnic Parish as Compromise: The Spheres of Clerical and Lay Authority in a Polish American Parish, 1911-1930, *Charles and Margaret Hall Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism Working Paper Series*, series 13, no. 1 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1983). In some Polish and Lithuanian Roman Catholic parishes Easter “tickets” were given to parishioners as proof of their completion of confession and thus proof of their good standing in the parish. These certificates could then be used to join a parish society or enroll one’s children in the parish school. This explanation of Easter “tickets” appears in James M. O’Toole, “In the Court of Conscience: American Catholics and Confession, 1900-1975,” in *Habits of Devotion: Catholic Religious Practice in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. James M. O’Toole (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 141. This explanation, however, is incomplete. In a footnote, O’Toole references Wolkovich-Valkavicius’s *Lithuanian Religious Life in America*. However, he does so inaccurately. Wolkovich-Valkavicius describes both uses of Easter “tickets” in his comprehensive study of Lithuanian Roman Catholic history in the United States: as “tickets” to make confession and as “tickets” to certify the completion of confession.

In the late nineteenth century, priests began pressing their parishioners to attend confession four times per year and, sometimes, even monthly.⁴⁸ Although monthly confession was standard instruction in Roman Catholic schools by the 1920s, most lay Catholics continued to practice annual confession well into the twentieth century.⁴⁹ Working-class immigrant Catholics, especially men, maintained fairly poor rates of confession.⁵⁰ Therefore, it is interesting how often Shenandoah lay Catholics stressed confession as the primary reason why they must be given a priest who speaks their native language. If Shenandoah's working-class immigrant Catholic population was like that anywhere else in the United States, then they certainly were not regularly demanding their parish priest to hear their confessions. Realistically, they probably only attempted to give their confessions once per year around Easter. In addition, hearing a confession did not necessarily require the confessor's full competence in the penitent's language. The process was fairly formulaic. In about two minutes, a confessor would listen a penitent's mostly run-of-the-mill sins, offer standard words of encouragement, assign a typical penance and say the short Act of Contrition in Latin.⁵¹ Situational diglossia, not full language competence, would suffice in almost all instances of confession. The Roman Catholic Church even published manuals with phrases in different languages to aid priests in hearing confessions.⁵² It seems, therefore, that lay Catholics strategically described their troubles regarding

⁴⁸ Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 24.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ O'Toole, "In the Court of Conscience," 152.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 141.

confession in their communications with Archbishop Wood in order to evoke his sympathy and provoke him to act in their favor. Most of all, they stressed the spiritual implications of their inability to give confession to a non-Lithuanian-speaking priest.

In his March 1878 letter to Archbishop Wood, Miller, again “On Behalf of Committee,” stressed the heightened urgency of the “Lithuanian” faction’s language-centered troubles. “Another matter which we which to draw to Your Grace’s attention to,” Miller wrote, “is this now that the time is drawing near when the church under pain of mortal sin commands all her children to approach the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist...”⁵³ In other words, Easter was nearing, which, Miller reminded Wood, required Catholics to make confession. He explained the parish’s failure to convince Lenarkiewicz to invite Rev. Koncz to come from Baltimore to hear confessions in Lithuanian “so that we and our children might make our peace with God.”⁵⁴ He noted, however, that Lenarkiewicz did agree to again bring a priest from nearby Danville to hear confession. Attempting to clarify their situation, Miller explained: “there is as much difference Your Grace between the two languages [Polish and Lithuanian] as there is between Irish and English.”⁵⁵ Resolving this conflict, Miller wrote, was up to Wood: “Now then are we going to comply with the commands of the church as regards our Easter duty or how are our children who are ready and willing to be instructed so as to be conferred or receive the first communion is a question which

⁵³ Letter to Archbishop Wood from George Miller, March 24, 1878, Wood Collection, 51.354Con, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

you alone can solve.”⁵⁶ Boldly, Miller reminded Wood, “We built that church and we maintained it,” and so justified his threat: “We want an answer or if not the people are going to see what they can do by recourse to the law.”⁵⁷

Shenandoah’s diplomatic strategy of petitioning Archbishop Wood for a new priest, and later a new parish, one that would meet the linguistic, ethnic, and thus spiritual needs of its members, was not unique. The practical issue of language – the importance of a priest’s ability to communicate with his parishioners in their native tongue – was frequently evoked by Catholics who identified themselves as Polish, Lithuanian, Slovak, Croatian, Hungarian and Italian in petitions to bishops for new priests and/or new parishes. For example, petitioners representing “over six hundred members of the Holy Roman Catholic Church” in the city of Philadelphia wrote to Archbishop Wood in order to secure the services of a Polish-speaking priest.⁵⁸ The petition, dated March 9, 1882, noted the current season of Lent: “That in their sorrow and great anxiety, especially in this season of fast and prayer, they have organized into a Church Society.”⁵⁹ In an 1882 petition to Archbishop Wood, Polish-speaking lay Catholics agitating for a new parish stressed language – “that a majority of them do not understand any, but their native language” – as a serious spiritual obstacle.⁶⁰ The petitioners explained: “they can not fulfill the obligations of their Holy Religion, especially confession of their sins and transgressions.”⁶¹

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Letter to Archbishop Wood from Polish Catholics, March 9, 1882, Wood Collection, 52.73Ach, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Petition to Archbishop Wood from Polish Catholics, March 9, 1882, Wood Collection, 52.73Ach, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

An 1890s petition to the archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia, Patrick John Ryan, asked a question that surely the archbishop could not lightly dismiss: “Are the poor Hungarians in this City who do not understand German or English destined to lose their souls just because they live in Philadelphia, and because they are unable to speak or understand English or German?”⁶² The petitioners explained how, upon having no choice but to attend English- or German-language churches, many “Hungarians” “fall away from their religion, and become negligent in the performing of their religious duties.”⁶³ For example, the petition continued: “They are unable to go to confession, as they are not understood, and therefore do not go at all.”⁶⁴ Similarly, petitioners representing thousands of “Italian Catholic citizens of Philadelphia” explained to Archbishop Ryan in 1896 how many of the city’s fifteen thousand Italians “from want of proper care and sympathy have not attended mass or the Sacraments for ten years.”⁶⁵

Above all, lay Catholics provided the inaccessibility of confession as the prime spiritual hindrance caused by a priest’s incompetence in the language of his parishioners. Interestingly, petitioners rarely mentioned a priest’s inability to give sermons in certain languages, thus denying his flock access to the Word of God, or a priest’s inability to talk with parishioners about more practical concerns. The two minutes that an average working-class immigrant Roman Catholic spent on his annual confession, after all, might be the only time he or she spoke to his or her pastor over the

⁶² Petition to Archbishop Ryan from Hungarian Catholics of Philadelphia, n.d., Ryan Collection, 61.101Ach, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Petition to Archbishop Ryan from the Italian Catholic citizens of Philadelphia, Dec. 25, 1896, Ryan Collection, 61.111Acl, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

course of an entire year. Regardless of this reality, lay Catholic petitions were often written in a matter-of-fact way: quite simply, if a priest could not speak a parishioner's language, then he could not hear confessions and so could not administer the sacrament of penance. The spiritual implications of this hindrance, so believed petitioners, would have been apparent to any Roman Catholic bishop. Thus, they strategically described their linguistic-related troubles as no less than spiritual crises in order to heighten the urgency of their situations and evoke the sympathy of members of the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy who, notably, did not speak any language but English, Latin and perhaps Irish or German.

Miller wrote to Archbishop Wood again in June 1878, after Easter had “come and gone”: “...there is [sic] over three hundred people without the satisfaction of receiving into our Souls the Grace left by Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.”⁶⁶ In other words, thanks to Wood's inaction, more than three hundred Catholics failed to make their Easter duty and so did not receive Communion. Pointing out “a true statement of fact,” Miller claimed that “over 26 children” who “want to be Catoliks [sic]” were in need of receiving “the Sacraments.”⁶⁷ All this, he explained, was “owing to the want of a proper Priest to minister unto them who can understand them.”⁶⁸ He pleaded: “we your oppressed children beg of You to do something for us your children and we will ever be faithful to and to that Church of which You are a worthy representative.”⁶⁹ Wood continued his silence on the Saint Casimir matter and again took no action; two weeks later, on Sunday, July 7, 1878, a riot broke out in the churchyard.

⁶⁶ Letter to Archbishop Wood from George Miller, June 23, 1878, Wood Collection, 51.357Con, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

3.4 RIOTING AND “BAD CATHOLICS”

Saint Casimir parishioners resorted to riot in the midst of its “Lithuanian” faction’s failing diplomatic effort to replace their priest. Having been ignored by Archbishop Wood for an entire year, the long-simmering conflict in Saint Casimir boiled over into the greater community. The riot motivated thirty-seven “citizens of the Borough of Shenandoah,” “not of your Christian Denomination” (i.e., not Roman Catholic) to write to Wood about “the great disquiet and unrest prevailing in [Saint Casimir].”⁷⁰ They urged the archbishop “by any means calculated to bring peace and well-being to said congregation” in hopes “that recent events which caused great excitement in this community shall not be repeated.”⁷¹ Seven men from “the Committee of the Church, representing the majority and the peaceable members of the Parish, at Shenandoah” wrote to Wood in support of Lenarkiewicz, praising the prelate “for appointing to administer to our Spiritual welfare, so good a man...in whom we have the utmost confidence and esteem.”⁷² Fueled by “their animosity” for Lenarkiewicz, they explained, “the belligerents of our Parish” locked the church gates and thus sparked the riot.⁷³ Instead of writing to Wood to explain their actions and thus contradict such negative interpretations of recent events, representatives of Saint Casimir’s “Lithuanian” faction published their side of the story in a local English-language newspaper. Through this diplomatic tactic, the faction leaders sought not only to inform the archbishop of their position on the riot in particular, but also to publicize their side of the entire conflict

⁷⁰ Petition to Archbishop Wood from concerned, non-Catholic citizens of Shenandoah borough, July 15, 1878, Wood Collection, 51.358Con, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Letter to Archbishop Wood from “Committee of the Church” (representing the Polish of Shenandoah), July 10, 1878, Wood Collection, 51.370Con, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

within Saint Casimir. Doing so was an attempt by “Lithuanian” faction leaders to raise their parish-level conflict to the level of the community since their communications with the archbishop failed to escalate it to the diocesan level.

In a letter to the editor of Shenandoah’s weekly *Catholic Herald*, Saint Casimir’s “Lithuanian” faction, claiming to represent “About 600 Lithuanians,” published “An Explanation of the Polish Catholic Church Difficulty.”⁷⁴ Claiming to “have been misrepresented by all the newspapers throughout the country,” which “called us devils in human form,” Shenandoah’s “Lithuanians” wanted to divulge “the truth” to the American public.⁷⁵ “The Lithuanians are an honest people,” the letter read, “and the charge that we are compelled to submit to the dictates of our leaders is an unfounded statement. We do no harm to anybody, and have never molested the citizens of any place in which we have resided...”⁷⁶ The letter explained the situation immediately preceding the Sunday morning riot: Saint Casimir’s “Lithuanian” parishioners gathered in front of the church to ask their pastor for “a Lithuanian priest to whom our poor people can confess their sins.”⁷⁷ Lenarkiewicz, in response, misinterpreted the peaceful confrontation as “an aggravation” and so, along with several policemen, “began to maltreat and arrest the poor women who were present” and, according to witnesses, “struck a number of parishioners with a large bunch of keys.” “[T]he act was so cruel,” the letter-writers wrote, “that it cries out for itself.”⁷⁸

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

According to the letter to the editor, Lenarkiewicz had been spreading lies about the riot, claiming that his opponents “used knives, pistols and stones.”⁷⁹ Unlike in their many letters and petitions to Archbishop Wood, members of Saint Casimir’s “Lithuanian” faction directly attacked Lenarkiewicz in the newspaper. They blamed the priest, who “should have asked us what we wanted,” for the recent riot. “He knew what we desired,” the letter read, “and in not granting it what is to become of us and our poor children? Every religion wants to follow its church, but Rev. Alex Lenarkiewicz and his few Poles want to separate us from our church and religion.”⁸⁰ The “Lithuanians” claimed to have founded the parish and to have, unlike its “Polish” members, financially contributed to its growth and upkeep.⁸¹ Lenarkiewicz, they claimed, “stated in church that we should go up to the hill further and build a church for ourselves if we are not satisfied.”⁸² At the moment, however, they explained, they could not financially do so. Therefore, they pleaded to the general public via the open letter: “Now every person who sees the case right will only say that what we have done is commendable, and we intend to keep up our religion which Jesus Christ left us.”⁸³

Opposition to the “Lithuanian” faction emphasized a simple argument against the priest’s enemies: they lied. In addition to this claim, the priest’s supporters also sought to discredit members of the “Lithuanian” faction, especially its leadership, to Archbishop Wood. Not only were they disobedient, but they also were “bad Catholics,” and as such they were not to be trusted. In November 1877, Saint Casimir parishioners in favor of retaining Lenarkiewicz warned Wood of Strupinskas’s “friends” who, since

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

Lenarkiewicz's arrival in July 1877, "have been busy to devise plans by which to secure his restoration to the pulpit."⁸⁴ According to the "committee," of which the president and secretary signed the letter with nine others, the "Lithuanian" faction's claim – that "the majority" of Saint Casimir parishioners "are not sufficiently conversant with the polish language to appreciate the divine services," which they expressed to Wood via a petition – was "untrue."⁸⁵ Referring to Lithuanian as "jargon," the letter-writers argued that although many parishioners "spoke at home a dialect unlike the correct polish tongue," "not twenty" of them "are ignorant of the true polish tongue."⁸⁶ In other words, those who petitioned Wood to remove Lenarkiewicz exaggerated their need for a Lithuanian-speaking priest. In fact, they noted, Lenarkiewicz regularly used Lithuanian "in his religious discourses."⁸⁷ Identifying themselves as "representing the better element and majority of congregation," the letter-writers identified Strupinskas's "relatives" as the most likely source of their parish's "dissatisfaction" and argued that most of the signatures on a recent petition were "fraudulent."⁸⁸

Apparently, Wood forwarded Lenarkiewicz a January 1878 petition sent to the archbishop in opposition to the priest. Along with the petition, Wood sent a letter, which Lenarkiewicz read from the pulpit during Mass one Sunday, denouncing the priest's opponents "in language not at all complimentary to us as Catholics."⁸⁹ Claiming that Lenarkiewicz "called us unbelievers and went so far as to publish off the Altar of God the names that were attached to the first petition," the letter-writers reminded

⁸⁴ Letter to Archbishop Wood from L. Bronzis, et. Al., Nov. 3, 1877, Wood Collection, 51.345Con, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Letter to Archbishop Wood from George Miller (on behalf of the Poles), Jan. 28, 1878, Wood Collection, 51.362Con, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

Wood that the signatures on the petition belonged to “men who built [Saint Casimir] for the benefit of themselves and families and who maintain it as long as God spares them.”⁹⁰ Certainly, in their eyes, they did not deserve such harsh treatment from their priest or bishop. In the letter, “Lithuanian” faction representative George Miller expressed parishioners’ surprise at Lenarkiewicz’s exposure and public censure of specific members of his opposition. He pleaded with Wood for a new priest to replace Lenarkiewicz, who refused to meet with the committee elected by his concerned constituents. In his letter, Miller lamented the consequence of Wood’s inaction: “our church stands demolished and as a curiosity in the public of Shenandoah and we as a lot of fools to be laughed at.”⁹¹

Somehow, most likely thanks to the archbishop’s office, Lenarkiewicz received some of the telegraphs leaders of the “Lithuanian” faction sent to Wood. In a letter to Wood dated July 16, 1878, Lenarkiewicz explained how two women who sent the archbishop a telegraph pleading for a Lithuanian-speaking priest in order to minister to them during their current illness could also “understand Polish and English.”⁹² In addition, the women were “not long sick at all,” which Lenarkiewicz could prove with witnesses “who can testify they saw them in taverns on Sunday last.”⁹³ In short, he wrote, “the telegrams are false.”⁹⁴ Lenarkiewicz expressed hope that George Miller, the man who seemed to have encouraged the sending of many such telegrams, would soon

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Letter to Archbishop Wood from Rev. Lenarkiewicz, July 16, 1878, Wood Collection, 51.360Con, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

find the congregation tired of him.⁹⁵ The existence of such letters hints at the archbishop office's strategy of sending complaints straight to Lenarkiewicz in order to let him deal with troublemakers within his congregation himself.

Wood likewise forwarded Lenarkiewicz a December 1879 petition in which the "Lithuanian" faction first requested a new parish. In a reply to Wood, Lenarkiewicz called the letter "but a tissue of lies."⁹⁶ He defended himself, writing, "I am able to administer all the Sacraments to all speaking the Litruisch dialect."⁹⁷ Concerned that his parish-level troubles may have been exaggerated to Wood, he wrote: "The Congregation at present is perfectly quiet, notwithstanding the misstatements sent to You [sic]."⁹⁸ According to Lenarkiewicz and his supporters, his competence in Lithuanian did not impede his ability to serve all members of his parish, regardless of their native tongue. He regularly used Lithuanian in order to minister to the small number of his parishioners who did not understand Polish. According to Lenarkiewicz's opposition, he was incompetent in Lithuanian and so could not properly minister to a significant portion of Saint Casimir's congregation. This incompetence, most significantly, put many of his parishioners, more than three hundred according to one estimate, spiritually at risk. Both sides active in the conflict claimed the other side lied. Certainly Wood or anyone in the diocesan office in Philadelphia would have had difficulty discerning the severity of the troubles at Saint Casimir: it was basically Lenarkiewicz's and his supporters' word against that of the committee that claimed to

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Letter to Archbishop Wood from Alexius Lenarkiewicz, Dec. 29, 1879, Wood Collection, 52.205Aso, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

represent the parish's Lithuanian-speaking members. Wood, by declining to act other than to forward Lenarkiewicz complaints about his ministry, let his support passively fall behind the priest.

In order to dispute the claims set forth in the "Lithuanian" faction's December 1879 petition, Lenarkiewicz attempted to discredit its leadership to Wood. He identified one of the main authors as "a member of a secret Society Knights of Labor;" he identified another as a "Freemason" who did not even belong to the parish and who confessed that he did not believe in the sacrament of penance.⁹⁹ Lenarkiewicz again attempted to discredit his opposition in an August 1880 letter to Wood, which he wrote in response to another petition forwarded to him by the archbishop. According to Lenarkiewicz, the proclaimed "President" of the committee representing his opposing faction, Joseph Janicki, swore in court that only fifteen to twenty-five members of Saint Casimir did not understand Polish.¹⁰⁰ He wrote: "and now that he [Janicki] goes back on his word, leaves him with – to say the least – a character hardly worth the questions." In addition, he noted: "He is also a member of a secret society."¹⁰¹ This detail would have certainly caught Wood's attention, considering the Roman Catholic Church's ban on membership in secret societies.¹⁰² In addition, Wood would have known of recent labor unrest among Irish coal miners sparked by the Molly Maguires in eastern Pennsylvania. Certainly, as a prelate in the Roman Catholic Church, Wood would have wanted to rid the Church of such radicalism.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* The Knights of Labor (est. 1869) gained the approval of the Roman Catholic Church in 1887 due to the efforts of Cardinal James Gibbons and the support of Cardinal John Ireland.

¹⁰⁰ Letter to Archbishop Wood from Ernest Deham, St. Casimir's Church, Aug. 2, 1880, Wood Collection, 52.72Ach, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Canon 529 of 1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code* of the Roman Catholic Church reads: "[The faithful] should beware of associations that are secret, condemned, seditious, suspected, or those which strive to withdraw from the legitimate supervision of the Church."

In order to discredit Augustine Zeytz, the committee secretary, Lenarkiewicz noted that he was “a convert from Lutheranism.”¹⁰³ The priest described him as “the principal cause of all this trouble” and therefore a man “unworthy of belief.”¹⁰⁴ Lenarkiewicz continued: “The Treasurer Charles Rice is a Free Mason.”¹⁰⁵ One leader, he wrote, was a saloonkeeper who spoke English and Polish, not just “Liturisch.”¹⁰⁶ Another, who also spoke Polish, regularly attended Mass, but had not received Communion in two years.¹⁰⁷ One particularly troublesome leader “was accused and tried in Court – of locking the entrance to the Church” and was therefore fined.¹⁰⁸ Another man was not even “a native of Poland” and so therefore had suspicious motivations.¹⁰⁹ Lenarkiewicz wrote that although he described in detail only a few people whose names appeared on a recent petition forwarded to him by Wood, “they fairly represent the many, in this way, that as bad as they are, the others are their fit companions.”¹¹⁰

In addition to attacking the character of his opponents, Lenarkiewicz also vehemently denied any failure of his to provide his parishioners sufficient spiritual care. He wrote: “...let me say that to charge that anyone has ever died without the Sacraments through any fault or inability of mine to administer the Sacraments I simply say they lie, and I assert most truly I am not only able and accomplished enough

¹⁰³ Letter to Archbishop Wood from Ernest Deham, St. Casimir’s Church, Aug. 2, 1880.

¹⁰⁴ Lenarkiewicz wrote that his description of Zeytz could be supported by Rev. B. Gramlewicz of Nanticoke, Pennsylvania, who, interestingly, went on to have his own parish-level problems in 1883, which eventually resulted in schism [Letter to Archbishop Wood from Ernest Deham, St. Casimir’s Church, Aug. 2, 1880].

¹⁰⁵ Letter to Archbishop Wood from Ernest Deham, St. Casimir’s Church, Aug. 2, 1880.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

to administer the Sacraments to all my flocks, but I also am able and do preach to them in the Liturisch dialect.”¹¹¹ Lenarkiewicz included with the letter notes by two other Roman Catholic priests in other Shenandoah parishes confirming his statements. One priest wrote: “...I affirm that Janitzki [sic] and Rice are members of secret societies, hence not Catholics and have no right to complain” and that “Zeitzy [sic] is in my opinion a German.”¹¹² This priest, Rev. H. F. O’Reilly, pastor of Annunciation Roman Catholic Church (Irish) in Shenandoah, wrote separately to Wood on July 31, 1880 in support of “Lenarkewiski [sic].”¹¹³ “As a rule,” O’Reilly wrote, “the people are very well disposed.”¹¹⁴ He explained that support for Lenarkiewicz’s predecessor had almost “died out” when revived by “a new actor,” “Augustin Zeytz a German, who spent sometime in a Convent in Poland as a lay brother,” but had since “left off the religious habit for religious good.”¹¹⁵ According to O’Reilly, Zeytz worked as a “Quack Doctor or cure-all medicine man” and “is the principle [sic] cause of the complaints and petitions,” which had no factual basis.¹¹⁶ In the letter, he accused Zeytz “and a few other bad ones” of “national prejudice” and “mercenary motives” in their opposition to Lenarkiewicz.¹¹⁷

O’Reilly, who certainly spoke neither Polish nor Lithuanian, confirmed Lenarkiewicz’s competence in “the Letish Language.”¹¹⁸ Not only had Lenarkiewicz “mastered” Lithuanian, but he also was regularly invited to other parishes in order to

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Letter to Archbishop Wood from H. F. O’Reilly, pastor Annunciation, Shenandoah, July 31, 1880, Wood Collection, 53.178Acl, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

hear confessions in Lithuanian.¹¹⁹ “The persons who make the complaints understand and speak English very well,” O’Reilly wrote, “if they neglect their religious duties it is not for want of a Priest, or Priests, who can understand them and are always willing to attend them.”¹²⁰ To support his claims, O’Reilly provided some details of a few of the leading “malcontents”: Janicki was “the organizer of the Knights of Labor among the Poles in Shenandoah and their president (a secret society);” Rice “has always been looked upon as a Polish Jew, he does not pretend to be a Catholic;” one man refused to bury his child in the Roman Catholic cemetery; another was not Polish, but Irish, significantly “not a Catholic” and a landlord to many Polish tenants to whom he also sold whiskey “without a license.”¹²¹ Claiming to be able to discredit even more of Lenarkiewicz’s opposition “of like character,” O’Reilly wrote that the men he did describe were “sufficient” to prove the unreliability of any statements they may have sent to Wood.¹²²

3.5 ETHNICITY

In a March 1880 letter signed by members of “a Committee duly appointed and elected to represent the Litursch people of Shenandoah and vicinity,” Saint Casimir’s “Lithuanian” faction again articulated their troubles to Archbishop Wood in spiritual terms.¹²³ Emphasizing their need to have their confessions heard in their native

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Letter to Archbishop Wood from officers and trustees of the Committee to Represent Lithuanians, March 4, 1880, Wood Collection, 51.369Con, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

language, they reminded Wood of the importance of the current season: “especially that now the sacred season of Lent is upon us, and our people ardently desire to avail themselves of its blessed privileges, and particularly those of Easter Confession.”¹²⁴ This time, however, the letter-writers did not ask Wood to simply replace Lenarkiewicz with a “Litursch”-speaking priest, but to permit them to build a church for “our people.”¹²⁵ Just what the letter-writers meant by “our people” was by no means evident, even to their many followers within Saint Casimir. They hoped, however, to make it appear evident to the archbishop. In moving from an identity based on language to one based on ethnicity, leaders of Saint Casimir’s “Lithuanian” faction were able to justify and gain further support for their new cause: a Lithuanian parish.

Historians must cautiously use ethnic and national terms such as “Polish” and “Lithuanian,” which are, although not meaningless, certainly deductive. This was especially true in the late nineteenth century, well before the existence of not only the modern nation states of Poland and Lithuania, but also the modern national identities currently associated with these countries. Saint Casimir members’ use of the words “Litursch,” “Liturisch” and “Lithau” to describe what today may arguably be called the Lithuanian language and Lithuanian ethnic/national identity exemplifies the real complication behind ethnic and national terms.¹²⁶ These terms were often used in lay Catholics’ English-language correspondence with non-Lithuanian-speaking English-American (James Frederick Wood), Irish (Patrick John Ryan and Edmond Francis Prendergast) and Irish-American (Dennis Joseph Cardinal Dougherty) bishops in the

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Interestingly, the term “Letish” was even once used by an outsider to describe the parish’s seemingly linguistic-based troubles.

Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The term “Lithuanian” was not used exclusively in such communications until 1900, before which it was used interchangeably with “Litursch,” “Liturisch” and “Lithau.” Early in their conflict, members of Saint Casimir’s “Lithuanian” faction did not use any such words to describe themselves, but instead, for example, closed an 1878 letter to Archbishop Wood by referring to themselves as “your poor oppressed Polish Catholics of Shenandoah.”¹²⁷ Determining whether these people were Lithuanian or not is a tricky task: they were “Lithuanian,” but not in the modern-day sense of the term. In addition to being “Lithuanian,” they were also, as they claimed, “Litursch,” “Liturisch” and “Lithau,” terms which have no meaning today.

Shenandoah’s Saint Casimir Roman Catholic Church has the interesting distinction of being not only the oldest Polish parish in the diocese of Philadelphia, but also the oldest Lithuanian Roman Catholic parish in the United States.¹²⁸ Upon its establishment in 1872, the parish was marked as a “Polish Catholic Church” in both civil and church records.¹²⁹ According to a 1941 history of neighboring Saint George Roman Catholic Church (est. 1891, Lithuanian): “Through a queer quirk of legal circumstances, inadvertence on somebody’s part, or perhaps due to a desire to hold both the Lithuanians and Poles together, the church was recorded with civil and diocesan authorities as a Polish Church, instead of Lithuanian.”¹³⁰ This “queer quirk” was much to the dismay of several of Saint George’s founding members, many of whom were also

¹²⁷ Letter to Archbishop Wood from George Miller, March 24, 1878, Wood Collection, 51.354Con, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

¹²⁸ Saint Casimir is described in a 1947 history as “the mother of all Polish parishes in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia” [*Diamentowy Jubileusz: Parafia Św. Kazimierza, w Shenandoah, Pa., 1872-1947* (Shenandoah, PA: 1947), 6].

¹²⁹ Wolkovich-Valkavicius, *Lithuanian Religious Life in America*, 87.

¹³⁰ *Shenandoah, Pa., Lietuvių Katalikų Šv. Jurgio Parapija 50 Metų Sukakčiai Paminėti Leidinys, 1891-1941* (Shenandoah, PA, 1942), 28.

founding members of Saint Casimir. In the late nineteenth century, the term “Polish” still meant for many what has since been split into the terms “Polish” and “Lithuanian.” Therefore, Saint Casimir’s status as a “Polish” ethnic parish was largely owing to its founding members’ lack of a modern national identity. In other words, it was not a mistake at the time; the mistake became more evident as more and more parish members consciously became “Lithuanian” or “Polish” (or perhaps neither). Hence, it is perfectly sensible that Saint Casimir, named for the patron saint of Lithuania, was both the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia’s oldest Polish parish and the United States’ oldest Lithuanian Roman Catholic parish.

Polish nationalism was, originally, a civic nationalism defined primarily by Poles’ common struggle for liberty. Their mid-nineteenth-century nationalism would have characterized many in Saint Casimir’s congregation in the 1870s and 1880s who may have then been in the process of nationalizing. From today’s perspective, the quagmire that was nineteenth-century Polish romantic nationalism is exemplified by Poland’s national poet, Adam Mickiewicz. Mickiewicz (1798-1855) was born in Lithuania in a town located in modern-day Belarus, but that was then part of the Russian Empire. He never traveled to Poland proper in his life and wrote exclusively in the Polish language. Mickiewicz left Poland in 1824, at age twenty-six. He only briefly returned in an attempt to join the November Uprising in 1830 (against Russian occupation), but arrived too late and so moved to Paris as part of Poland’s “Great Emigration.” In France, he wrote and published poems, books and articles for a Polish national emigre magazine and lectured on Slavic literature. Mickiewicz died in Constantinople in 1855 helping Poles fight Russia in the Crimean War. In 1890, his

remains were transferred from Paris and interred in Wawel Cathedral in Poland's medieval capital Kraków (then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire), a city he had never visited in his lifetime, with much nationalistic fanfare.¹³¹

An interesting figure, Mickiewicz is an outstanding example of Polish romantic nationalism. During his lifetime he was a spokesman for the memory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, whose demise pre-dated his own life by three years.¹³² Mickiewicz's epic poem, *Pan Tadeusz* (1834), begins with the words: "Lithuania! My homeland!" For Mickiewicz, who identified himself as Polish, it would not have seemed odd that what would become Poland's national poem would start with a reference to Lithuania. For him, as well as for many other nineteenth-century Polish nationalists, "Polish" national identity was based on the common struggle for liberty. In Mickiewicz's lifetime, and into the twentieth century, Poland's combatants in this struggle were three-fold: Russia, Prussia (later Germany) and Austria (later Austria-Hungary). Anyone who joined in this struggle was "Polish," including even those, like Mickiewicz, born in Lithuania.

Members of Saint Casimir's "Lithuanian" faction may have indeed initially identified themselves as Polish, à la Mickiewicz. In addition, they were also, as they claimed to be, Litursch, Liturisch, Lithau and Lithuanian. Although "Litursch," "Liturisch" and "Lithau" did not catch on as meaningful terms, they demonstrate a significant transition in self-identity, which many immigrants underwent in late-

¹³¹ See Keely Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland, 1848-1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

¹³² See Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century America. Simply put, though not simply accomplished, many members Saint Casimir's became Lithuanian, an ethnic identity that they used to gain support for their cause and to agitate for changes they desired to enact within their parish. According to a PNCC history book published in 1930, Saint Casimir's membership was "complicated": "half Polish" and "half Slovak, Rusyn and Lithuanian."¹³³ In modern terms, Saint Casimir's congregation was not bi-national (e.g., Polish and Lithuanian), but multi-national (e.g., Polish, Lithuanian and etc.). More accurately, however, it was nationalizing: parishioners were becoming "Lithuanian" or becoming "Polish" throughout its first few decades. It was Saint Casimir parishioners who were nationalized – who identified themselves as Lithuanian – who agitated first for a Lithuanian-speaking priest and then for a Lithuanian parish. Likewise, it was parishioners who identified as Polish who actively opposed the efforts of their opposition and sought to retain Lenarkiewicz as their pastor. Everyone else in the parish would have had to be convinced to join one side or the other. Many, significantly, were not becoming anything, but rather chose not to think much about their national or ethnic identities. These people, who practiced what historians like Pieter Judson, Tara Zahra and James Bjork describe as "national indifference," probably tried their best to stay out of the "Lithuanian v. Polish" dispute in Saint Casimir.¹³⁴

In December 1879, after more than two years of failed diplomatic efforts to replace Lenarkiewicz with an acceptable priest who, most importantly, spoke

¹³³ *Księga Pamiątkowa "33": Polsko Narodowego Katolickiego Kościoła, 1897-1930, Scranton, Pennsylvania* (Scranton, PA: Polish National Catholic Church, 1930), 270.

¹³⁴ See Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Tara Zahra, "Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis," *Slavic Review* 69, no. 1 (2010): 93-119; James E. Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole: Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

Lithuanian, members of Saint Casimir's "Lithuanian" faction upped their demands to a new parish altogether. Claiming two hundred thirteen "Litursch" parishioners "who are unable to speak or understand Polish," they asked for Wood's "permission to build and maintain their own Church and Priest."¹³⁵ "Lithuanian" leaders Joseph Janicki and Charles Rice explained that they favored a new parish "rather than have the conflict continue between the two factions."¹³⁶ Including the names and addresses of four "Liturisch" priests, including Rev. A. Koncz, the letter closed: "we trust you'll do what's best for the church."¹³⁷ Wood did not reply.

Expressing urgency in a January 9, 1880 letter to Wood, Janicki, Rice and August Zeytz asked the archbishop not for his permission to organize a new parish, but for his "gracious permission to purchase [land] and build [a church]."¹³⁸ Such, presumptuous from a bishop's perspective, lay agency was not uncommon across Catholic America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Lay Catholics frequently took initiative in forming their own parishes. It was not unusual, as in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, for lay Catholics to wait to ask for their bishop's permission to organize a new parish until after they had already done much of the preparation work. Such lay initiative included naming the parish, forming a committee or board of trustees (usually via elections), legally incorporating a religious society, soliciting members and donations, purchasing or identifying property on which to build a church (or finding a building to rent for worship) and finding a suitable priest. Lay

¹³⁵ Letter to Archbishop Wood from Charles Rice and J. Janicki, Dec. 18, 1879, Wood Collection, 51.365Con, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Letter to Archbishop Wood from J. Janicki, Jan. 9, 1880, Wood Collection, 52.70Ach, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA. Underline in original.

Catholics often delayed contacting their bishop about their plans until they absolutely needed him. Such an instance might be the appointment of a priest or the blessing of a church's cornerstone. Wood did not reply to the request from Saint Casimir's "Lithuanian" faction leaders, which prompted Janicki and Rice to send him a telegram five days later expressing concern about losing the opportunity to purchase the land.

Two weeks later, on January 29, 1880, Saint Casimir's "Lithuanian" faction sent Wood a petition signed by six committee members and two hundred thirty-one prospective members of the proposed Lithuanian parish. According to the petition, Wood promised "with pleasure to do anything in [his] power to promote the spiritual good of the Litursch people of Shenandoah."¹³⁹ The petitioners again reminded the archbishop of the serious spiritual consequences of his lack of action since they first petitioned him about Lenarkiewicz nearly three years prior. They wrote, in clear and formal English:

Failing to secure a change of Pastor in having assigned us one who could minister to us in the language intelligible to us – and having been some three (3) years without the appreciable ministrations of the 'Word' and 'Ordinances' of the 'Church,' through which we are instructed and derive spiritual blessings and comfort; and having also failed to obtain your permit to purchase a site and build a church exclusively for our people – we now once more present our prayer for a change of Priest as before presented and requested; one who can dispense the priestly offices in the language of our people and thereby do his parishioners the good the need.¹⁴⁰

To exemplify Lenarkiewicz's incompetence in Lithuanian, the petitioners described a recent attempt of his "to read a sermon which had evidently been written for him in the Litursch language."¹⁴¹ Apparently, Lenarkiewicz's inability to read the sermon

¹³⁹ Petition to Archbishop Wood from Lithuanians of Shenandoah, Jan. 29, 1880, Wood Collection, 51.366Con, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA. Excerpt provided is in quotes in original.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

“intelligibly” “excited the wrath and ridicule of his congregation.”¹⁴² Most likely, if earlier letters written to Wood about Lenarkiewicz’s incompetence in Lithuanian were accurate, the congregation would not have been at all surprised at this minor linguistic disaster. However, it seems as though Lenarkiewicz perceived his Lithuanian as although not perfect, certainly passable. Before ending their letter “respectfully” from “Truly from Your humble servants,” the petitioners politely made a serious threat: “Now, if your Excellence further decline to grant this our repeated and last prayer in such event we can only appeal to the Holy See at Rome.”¹⁴³

The following week, Janicki and Zeytz sent Wood yet another petition, with two hundred thirteen names of “permanent residents of the Borough of Shenandoah” who “respectfully represent so many families.”¹⁴⁴ Each name was noted with a “5,” “10” or, in a couple instances, a “20” or “50.”¹⁴⁵ The total “1,620” was given at the end of the list, apparently a count of donations or promised donations to the committee organized to establish a new Lithuanian parish.¹⁴⁶ Formally, the petition stated:

That they are purely of Litursch extraction and speak only the Litursch language; That they greatly desire to rear their children in accordance with the Holy Doctrines of the Church, and within its prescribed forms; That the ministrations by the Polish Priest, The Rev. Lanerkewitz [sic] now in this place, being exclusively in the Polish language, do not convey to them and their children, the true meaning of Divine Worship and spiritual instruction.¹⁴⁷

Their request was then repeated: “They therefore humbly pray Your Most Gracious Excellence, to permit them to purchase a site and build thereon a Church for their own

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Petition to Archbishop Wood from Joseph Janicki and August Zeytz, Feb. 3, 1880, Wood Collection, 51.368Con, PAHRC, Wynnwood, PA.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* \$1,620 is nearly \$37,000 in today’s dollars.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

exclusive use; in which the Litursch Language shall be used exclusively in all the dispensations of the Church by Priest and people, and they will ever pray etc. etc.”¹⁴⁸

Wood did not reply to either petition sent to him in January 1880, prompting leaders of Saint Casimir’s “Lithuanian” faction to write him again in February: “The delay of your Excellency in answering our petition has led us to believe that we will not be favored with a compliance with our requests.”¹⁴⁹ They warned: “This fact has become so deeply impressed on the minds of our people that they now demand the last extreme resort,” in other words, they would send representatives to Rome.¹⁵⁰ Janicki wrote of an upcoming meeting planned “at which final action will be taken – unless your Reverence will by a formable disposition of our prayer render it unnecessary.”¹⁵¹ They reminded Wood that they did indeed have the money and people needed “to establish and maintain a congregation of Liturisch exclusively (if need be).”¹⁵² Again, they stressed Lenarkiewicz’s incompetence: they could not “confide in” him, “knowing him well as we do.”¹⁵³ Interestingly, they noted the existence of fifty-two “Polish churches” in the United States, “but not one Litursch church,” although Saint Casimir was established in 1872 as a Lithuanian parish.¹⁵⁴ “In conclusion,” Janicki wrote, “as a true Catholic permit me to call immediate attention to our former requests and respectfully solicit a prompt response.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Letter to Archbishop Wood from J. Janicki, Feb. 10, 1880, Wood Collection, 51.367Con, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Nearly two and a half years after they first threatened “to appeal to a higher authority” should Archbishop Wood continue his silence, Saint Casimir’s “Lithuanian” faction attempted to escalate their intra-parish conflict to an international level.¹⁵⁶ In July 1880, trustees and more than two hundred members of the parish petitioned “His Holiness, Pope Leo XIII, At Rome.”¹⁵⁷ Careful to express their reverence for the pope’s holy office, they wrote:

That your petitioners are part of, and represent a Litursch population in above named locality of some five hundred souls, whose names, customs, and language are exclusively Litursch; and they unable to use, or understand any other dialect. That during the last three years they have been soliciting and endeavoring to obtain through their Arch-Bishop Wood, the appointment of a Priest who could administer to them the ordinances of the Church (of which they comprise so large and material a part) in the Litursch language. That all the prayers, petitions and personal applications of your petitioners (the latter by duly appointed Committees) have been alike futile and unavailing. That your petitioners knowing themselves competent to establish and maintain a Church purely for their exclusive accommodation as a Litursch people, have also been refused upon petition the ‘permission and sanction’ by Arch-Bishop Wood to build a church Edifice for their use.¹⁵⁸

The petitioners described the urgency of their situation, emphasizing their spiritual concerns:

That your petitioners are nearly all engaged in the manual occupation of Coal-mining and thereby necessarily involved in constant exposure and companionship with scenes of danger and death, and that very many of our people have thus suddenly died without the last solace and blessing that should have been imparted to them owing to the absence of a Priest to minister unto them.¹⁵⁹

In other words, without a “Litursch”-speaking priest, over two hundred Catholic souls were daily in jeopardy in Shenandoah. Certainly, the petitioners must have hoped, the

¹⁵⁶ Letter to Archbishop Wood from George Miller, Feb. 20, 1878, Wood Collection, 51.353Con, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

¹⁵⁷ Petition to Pope Leo XIII from petitioners from Shenandoah, March 10, 1880, Wood Collection, PAHRCWood52.749Ro, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

pope would be sympathetic to such a desperate cry for help. In response, however, the Vatican forwarded the petition to Archbishop Wood, the very person whose persistent inaction spurred the lay Catholics to petition the pope in the first place.

Two more years passed until Wood communicated directly with Saint Casimir's "Lithuanian" faction. After five years of silence, an advertisement published in Shenandoah's *The Annex* asking for proposals to build "a Lithuanian Roman Catholic Church" finally forced Wood to voice his opposition:

We notify all whom it may concern, that we have not authorized the purchase of the lots, nor the building of the church and that we in no way recognize the committee. We also notify the Polish congregation in Shenandoah that the Rev. Julian Dudkiewicz has no permission to say Mass, or in any way to exercise the sacred Ministry in this diocese.¹⁶⁰

A "Committee" representing "the Lithuanian Roman Catholics of Shenandoah" replied to Wood with "A Statement" of their "grievances" published in the same newspaper.¹⁶¹ According to this statement, Saint Casimir's "Lithuanian" faction received "the first official notice taken of any of our petitions and dispatches" sent to Wood in the form of a circular dated July 3, 1882. Specifically in response to the archbishop's rejection of their plan to build a new church and hire a priest themselves, the "Committee" wrote in its open letter: "We do not wish to be misunderstood in this matter." Instead of attacking Wood, "a good man" "whom we believe to be actuated by the single desire to advance the best interest of the church and ourselves," they attributed his inaction to misinformation "as to the true state of affairs here."¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Newspaper clipping, "A Statement of the Grievances of the Lithuanian Roman Catholics of Shenandoah," *Annex* (Shenandoah, PA), July 8, 1882, Wood Collection, 52.555Nm, PAHRC, Wynnwood, PA.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

Archbishop Wood died on June 20, 1883. According to a diocesan source, he had since 1880 suffered from “attacks of rheumatism,” which became so severe as to forbid him from making public appearances in the last year of his life.¹⁶³ A 1909 diocesan history describes how Wood’s “failing health made it physically impossible for him to visit and superintend” faraway parishes, which prompted him in 1868 to request Rome to form the Sees of Harrisburg and Scranton from territory belonging to the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.¹⁶⁴ Perhaps Wood’s persistent inaction throughout the Lenarkiewicz-centered conflict in Saint Casimir could be partially explained by his apparent ill health. Roman Catholic sources, however, often point to bishops’ old age and ailments as justification for anything that may have gone badly during their tenures, such as major conflicts or schisms. It seems more likely that Wood’s inaction was primarily motivated by his adoption of the traditional strategy of his office in regards to conflicts involving parish trustees or committees: to support the clergy and ignore the laity in the hope that the conflict would eventually die down and thus resolve itself. As a result of this strategy, schism was temporarily avoided in Shenandoah (until 1922), but before the eventual schism, a rupture did occur within the community when many members of Saint Casimir left to establish Saint George in 1891.

3.6 CONCLUSION

The 1870s/1880s conflict in Shenandoah’s Saint Casimir Roman Catholic Church is best understood not as a “Polish vs. Lithuanian” ethnic dispute, but as a dispute between

¹⁶³ Joseph L. J. Kirlin, *Catholicity in Philadelphia: From the Earliest Missionaries Down to the Present Time* (Philadelphia: John Jos. McVey, 1909), 391-392.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 383.

factions aligned in support of and in opposition to the parish's priest, Rev. Józef Aleksy Lenarkiewicz. For many parishioners, it was clear from early in his tenure that Lenarkiewicz was an unsuitable replacement for the parish's founding pastor, Rev. Andrius Strupinskas. Whatever the underlying reasons for their opposition may have been, Lenarkiewicz's opponents intentionally articulated their troubles to outsiders in terms of language and, later, ethnicity. They did so strategically as they employed diplomatic tactics in order to attempt to escalate their parish-level struggle to the level of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia. In their early letters and petitions to Archbishop James Frederick Wood, Shenandoah lay Catholics carefully presented their parish-level struggle as one of language, which, according to them, could be easily resolved through the replacement of Lenarkiewicz with a Lithuanian-speaking priest. When their efforts to enact the change they desired to see within their parish failed, leaders of Saint Casimir's "Lithuanian" faction began to agitate for a new Lithuanian parish, which they justified in terms of not only language, but also ethnicity. Although the "Lithuanian" faction's campaign successfully spurred on the nationalization of many Shenandoah residents and thus gained much local support, it failed to win over Archbishop Wood – Lenarkiewicz remained pastor of Saint Casimir until his death in 1904. Eventually, however, Wood's successor, Archbishop Patrick John Ryan, yielded to the "Lithuanian" faction's demands and granted permission to establish Saint George, a Lithuanian ethnic parish, in 1891.

Following Benedict Anderson, most scholars of nationalism find that imagination is a key component to any national identity. In other words, nations are imagined into existence. Likewise for most scholars, modernization provides the necessary context to

allow nationalism's imagining.¹⁶⁵ However, actors are also needed: people must actively create and promote the propagation and perpetuation of a national identity. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the rise of modern nationalism across Europe. This new development significantly impacted the actions, and thinking, of people living in the former lands of the partitioned Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (roughly, what would become the independent Republic of Poland in 1918) as well as those who immigrated abroad (e.g., to the United States). Many people, from a diverse population divided across three separate empires and fractured by a surge in voluntary emigration, came to embrace a Polish national or ethnic identity. The priest-centered conflict in Saint Casimir shows how Polish identity sometimes gave way to Lithuanian identity. Many immigrants from eastern and southeastern Europe, in the context of the United States and the American Roman Catholic Church, strategically used linguistic and ethnic-based arguments in order to diplomatically agitate in favor of or in opposition to priests as well as for new parishes.

In many communities across Catholic America, lay diplomatic action moved beyond the parish and diocese, all the way to Rome. Roman Catholic bishops, and certainly the pope, were rarely interested in talking with lay Catholics about their parish-level problems and, instead, preferred to let parish priests handle their troublesome parishioners themselves. Diplomacy implies dialogue, and in order for dialogue to be effective its participants must be both willing to communicate with each other and optimistic about the process's chance for success. Without the cooperation of members of the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy, lay Catholics' attempts to

¹⁶⁵ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

diplomatically achieve their goals often fell flat or, at best, resulted in only partial or temporary solutions. Lay Catholics became more pessimistic as their attempts at diplomacy continually failed to yield the results they desired. Refusing to be too easily stymied in their battles for control within their parishes, lay Catholics employed a range of strategies in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century immigrant America: militant, diplomatic, legal and schismatic. In moving from diplomatic to legal strategies, immigrant lay Catholics expanded their internal Church conflicts to the secular legal system of their adopted country. Knowingly risking being labeled “disobedient” and incurring the injuries that may come with such a label, lay Catholics who sought legal remedies to their parish- and diocesan-level conflicts demonstrated their commitment to their most desired goal: to secure control within their parishes.

CHAPTER 4

LEGAL STRATEGIES

“...I am told you have an erroneous opinion of the laws of the Catholic Church in America,” Rev. P. Masson told the Catholic community of Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, in 1910. “These laws have not been made by our beloved Archbishop,” the priest clearly articulated, “they are the laws of the Catholic Church. The Archbishop himself, you and myself, we all have to be obedient to these laws, otherwise we cease to be Catholics.”¹ Since Jesus Christ founded the Catholic Church, he explained, all Catholics must be like Jesus: obedient to the laws of “the church He founded.” Christ requires obedience from all, including the archbishop, who, the priest noted, has no power to change Church law. Sent to Shenandoah by the archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia, Patrick John Ryan, to respond to a priest-centered conflict within Saint George Roman Catholic Church (Lithuanian), the priest scolded the town’s Catholics who, in his eyes, stubbornly remained ignorant of Church laws. In his speech, the priest reaffirmed the pastor’s status as “the head, the ruler of all church affairs.”² He clarified: “The Pastor will have full control over the administration of the parish.”³ The Roman Catholic Church, he explained, is “one large family.” The Pope “rules” this “family;”

¹ “Speech Delivered in St. George’s Lithuanian Roman Catholic Church, Shenandoah, PA., by the Rev. P. Masson, A Representative of Archbishop Ryan, of Philadelphia, on the 8th Day of May, 1910,” May 8, 1910, Ryan Collection, 61.98Ach, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

each bishop and priest, likewise, “must rule” over his “one family.”⁴ The Catholic laity, the priest implied, were like the children in a family: their task was to obey their priests, bishops and pope.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Roman Catholic priests and bishops frequently described disobedient immigrant lay Catholics as ignorant. So too did outsiders. For example, in 1883, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported on a troubled parish in Buffalo, New York, describing the nearly one-thousand-member congregation as “mostly ignorant persons, unfamiliar with American customs and the English language.”⁵ In 1885, the *New York Times* reported on Rev. Dominic Kołasiński’s troubles with his parishioners, describing them as “a much more ignorant, equally passionate, and greatly less prudent class.”⁶ Three weeks later, the *New York Times* reported again on the continuing conflict in Detroit: “It is hoped that the worst is over, although it is recognized that a dangerous state of feeling is being aroused among the worst, most ignorant, class in the city.”⁷ When questioned about a certain troublemaker within his parish, one Philadelphia priest told the *New York Times* in 1904: “Our people are ignorant – very ignorant indeed.”⁸ Through their disobedient actions, immigrant lay Catholics did appear to be ignorant to Roman Catholic authorities and non-Catholics.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ “Mobbing a Priest,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sep. 9, 1883.

⁶ “Assaulted at the Altar,” *New York Times*, Dec. 3, 1885.

⁷ “An Ugly Mob in Detroit,” *New York Times*, Dec. 27, 1885.

⁸ “Lithuanian Church Row,” *New York Times*, Jan. 25, 1904.

In reality, however, many lay Catholics were not quite so ignorant: they were knowledgeable about their adopted country's democratic customs, the American legal system and the laws of the Roman Catholic Church.

One could with little difficulty, throughout his lifetime, regularly attend Mass, dutifully participate in the Roman Catholic sacraments, pay his church dues when so required and accept his priest's actions in running his parish. Regardless of his own personal opinions, a lay Catholic could easily follow through with such actions without public complaint or protest. After all, such a religiosity was perhaps the best way to ensure one's personal salvation. The concept of lay obedience in the Roman Catholic Church was ingrained within the laity: "good Catholics" were obedient to their priests and bishops. Any lay Catholic knew that to speak or act against a priest or bishop was to brush with disobedience. However, exactly when a person crossed from obedience to disobedience was unclear. Certainly, lay Catholics did not take their nearing the border of obedience lightly: the risk one took in crossing over into disobedience had to be worthwhile, especially spiritually. After all, anyone could get caught up in a church riot or two and remain anonymous to his bishop. However, to affix one's name to a petition or a lawsuit that challenged a bishop's authority was to blatantly flirt with danger.

The issue of control – control of the administration of parish finances, property and employees (especially priests) – was at the heart of every conflict within Shenandoah's Catholic community from the 1870s through the 1930s. This was true not only in Saint Casimir, as examined in chapter two, but also in Saint George (est. 1891, Lithuanian), as examined in this chapter, and Saint Stanislaus (est. 1898, Polish), as examined in chapter five. Likewise, similar battles for control persisted within

numerous immigrant communities across Catholic America for years, rising and falling in intensity throughout the end of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth. In some instances, such as in Shenandoah, lay Catholics turned to strategies afforded them via civil law in order to aid their battles for control within their parishes. This chapter examines how lay Catholics legally challenged Roman Catholic bishops by suing for rights to parish property in three Pennsylvania cities: Scranton, Shenandoah and Mahanoy City. Nineteenth-century Pennsylvania property laws, which vested the power to control ecclesiastical property in religious congregations, provided especially challenging conditions to Roman Catholic prelates who sought to further centralize control of their dioceses within their holy office. Sometimes lay Catholics' legal strategies succeeded in their attempts to secure control within their parishes; sometimes they failed. Overall, members of the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy won more legal battles than they lost and, consequentially, opportunities for lay agency within the Church diminished.

4.2 TRUSTEEISM

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Roman Catholics in the United States routinely organized, fundraised, purchased land and built churches through their own initiative.⁹ Sometimes priests were involved in the process of parish-formation, but not always. Frequently, deeds for land and buildings were drafted in the names of founding parishioners and/or priests. Parish organizers often did not contact

⁹ See Patrick W. Carey, *People, Priests, and Prelates: Ecclesiastical Democracy and the Tensions of Trusteeism* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987).

the diocesan bishop until they needed their church blessed and a priest to minister. Sometimes, congregations did so after they made arrangements to hire a particular priest and so only asked the bishop for his approval. It is at this point that deeds to parish property were typically conveyed to the diocesan bishop. If parish organizers were reluctant to do this, bishops would inform them that Church law, as legislated by several councils of the American episcopacy held in the nineteenth century, required him to hold the titles to all property within his diocese. Parishioners usually complied. After all, as the bishop certainly made clear, doing so was a non-negotiable prerequisite for him blessing the new parish (i.e., sanctifying what would otherwise be a profane space) and assigning a pastor. Conflict often erupted when parishioners refused to give up legal ownership of parish property they acquired through their own means.

Roman Catholic congregations regularly organized themselves as a trustee system: parishioners (usually males over twenty-one years of age) would annually vote to fill positions on a board of trustees (e.g., president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary). The parish trustees oversaw the temporal affairs of the church, including the administration of parish finances, property and employees (including priests). In some parishes, pastors were always on the board of trustees, sometimes serving as the ex-officio president; in others, pastors were intentionally excluded from the board. Congregations communicated with the diocesan bishop through their elected representatives. They did so most often through the parish secretary who, even in ethnic parishes, needed competency in the English language and in the American legal system. Hence, lay Catholics empowered themselves with the trustee system in order to express their desires for their parish to the diocesan bishop. Ideally, the trustee system

provided lay Catholics the means to ensure the enactment of changes they wanted to see in their parishes. However, for many Roman Catholic bishops and priests, the trustee system was a lingering nuisance which lay Catholics (and sometimes priests) used to irreverently challenge their religious superiors' divinely given authority.

Although the term “trusteeism” as used to describe this system seems neutral, and thus a preferable alternative to the better-known term “trustee controversy,” it is not without its contemporary critics who continue to endorse its negative connotation. For example, as recently as 2003, the entry for “trusteeism” in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* defines the term as “a form of insubordination in which lay parishioners, particularly lay parish trustees, on the basis of civil law claimed excessive parochial administrative powers and even the right to choose and dismiss pastors.”¹⁰ In addition to describing trusteeism as “lay intrusion into the temporal and temporal-spiritual affairs of the Catholic Church,” the entry uses such dismissive terms as “trustee-mania.”¹¹ Patrick W. Carey criticizes historians such as Robert McNamara, Thomas McAvoy and others for interpreting trusteeism “as an heretical and rebellious attempt by lay and clerical trustees to control the temporal and sometimes spiritual welfare of the local congregation.”¹² The formation of such interpretations, he notes, was heavily influenced by the Roman Catholic Church's own sanctioned versions of the “trustee controversy” in which lay trustees intentionally were portrayed as heretical and rebellious. The inclusion of McNamara's perspective of “trusteeism” in the latest edition

¹⁰ Robert F. McNamara, “Trusteeism,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume 14 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2003): 219.

¹¹ *Ibid.* Interestingly, the term “trustee-mania” was used by Rev. Joseph Cloriviere (1768-1826), a French-born priest who, while serving in Charleston, SC, became embroiled in a trustee-centered conflict [Carey, *People, Priests, and Prelates*, 22].

¹² Patrick Carey, “The Laity's Understanding of the Trustee System, 1785-1855,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 64, no. 3 (Jul 1978): 357.

of the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* – ideally, a source of unbiased and scholarly information – shows the continued acceptance of anti-trusteeism within the dominant paradigm of American Catholic history.¹³

Considering the perspective of lay trustees, Carey writes, “trusteeism can be defined as a lay and clerical movement to adapt the European Catholic Church to American culture by identifying that Church with American republicanism.”¹⁴ In other words, trustees were not crazed rebels, but rather strategic republicans who saw many potential benefits for their Church in the actions they took to implement democratic practices within their parishes. The “diasporic conditions” of the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century American Roman Catholic Church – numbers were small and the Church, as an institution, was primitively organized – encouraged lay initiative, which, Carey explains, “manifested itself most clearly through the trustee system.”¹⁵ German and Irish Catholic immigrants found in the trustee system a solution to their desires to adapt their European Church to its new American context in the early nineteenth century. The rising spirit of democracy, ushered in by the American Revolution, helped to reshape Catholics’ understanding of authority. In Jay P. Dolan’s words, “It created a spirit of populism as the people’s choice, not the preacher’s

¹³ According to his entry in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, it appears as though McNamara’s understanding of trusteeism changed little from a 1944 article he had published in the *Catholic Historical Review* [Robert F. MacNamara, “Trusteeism in the Atlantic States, 1785-1863,” *Catholic Historical Review* XXX (July, 1944): 135-154.].

¹⁴ Carey, “The Laity’s Understanding of the Trustee System,” 358.

¹⁵ John Carroll, the United States’ first Roman Catholic bishop, was appointed superior of the American Catholic missions in 1784, elected bishop by American clergymen in 1789 (the first and only American prelate to so democratically advance) and consecrated in 1790. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Baltimore (est. 1789), Carroll’s Apostolic See, was first divided in 1808 with the creation of the Dioceses of Bardstown (Kentucky), Boston, New York and Philadelphia; Carey, *People, Priests, and Prelates*, 59.

prerogative.”¹⁶ In other words, European Catholics, in the new context of the democratic American republic, felt empowered to take on leadership roles within their local parishes. In addition, they felt that the Roman Catholic Church needed to adapt to its new circumstances (i.e., democracy instead of monarchy) in order to flourish in the United States.

In *People, Priests, and Prelates: Ecclesiastical Democracy and the Tensions of Trusteeism*, Carey explains that early-nineteenth-century trustee “tensions” were, in his words, “qualitatively conditioned by the American experience of the Enlightenment, the republican mentality of the age, the legal system, and by the peculiar composition of the immigrant Catholic congregations.”¹⁷ He argues that in addition to the American Roman Catholic Church’s development of legislation that aimed to abolish the trustee system, the change in the makeup of the Catholic laity also helped to usher in the end of congregationalism in the Church. The post-Famine Irish immigration to the United States, he explains, was largely poor and uneducated, as well as mostly obedient to Church authority and generally uninterested in church governance.¹⁸ If their arrival helped to end trusteeism by the mid nineteenth century, then why did Catholics from eastern and southeastern Europe – who, were not only largely poor and uneducated like the post-Famine Irish, but also came from empires in which they had no experience of democracy or republicanism – regularly organize their parishes under the trustee system in the late nineteenth century? In addition to having characteristics that would seem disinclined towards trusteeism, these working-class immigrant Catholics’

¹⁶ Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 29.

¹⁷ Carey, *People, Priests, and Prelates*, 279.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

attempts to secure control within their parishes were also frustrated by a Church that, by the end of the nineteenth century, was organizationally strong and decidedly anti-trustee.

Carey recognizes that the trustee system did not entirely disappear in 1860 with the end of a parish conflict in Buffalo, New York: “Although the tensions of trusteeism were confined to the antebellum period,” he writes, “the issues behind the conflicts reappeared in subsequent history because they remained unresolved.”¹⁹ This claim is somewhat inaccurate: unresolved issues behind antebellum trusteeism did reappear in the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era, but so too did the tensions of trusteeism. In both the early and late nineteenth century, trustees (lay and clerical) legally owned and possessed varying degrees of control over ecclesiastical properties within Roman Catholic parishes. The reemergence of trusteeism after the Civil War provides evidence that the Roman Catholic Church was not entirely successful in its efforts to centralize control of its properties solely within the offices of its bishops. Lay Catholics continued to found parishes and form boards of trustees without preapproval of bishops well into the twentieth century. Significantly, they did so despite numerous (and repetitive) legislative actions taken by Roman Catholic clerical leadership intended to end the practice of lay initiative and the trustee system in the American Church. The persistence of these means of lay control demonstrates that large portions of the Catholic laity in America did not readily accept the authority of their Church’s ordained leadership. In fact, as with the ethnic parishes, they often directly challenged it.

Trustee-centered conflicts in Catholic America simmered, sometimes for decades, over conflicting answers to two central questions: 1.) What role did the laity have in the

¹⁹ *Ibid.*,

administration of parish property and finances? And 2.) What role did the laity have in the appointment and dismissal of parish priests? Like the priest clarified to disobedient Catholics in Shenandoah in 1911: Roman Catholic bishops and priests “must rule” over their flocks, and the laity, in return, must obey. In contrast, many lay persons, some quite tenaciously, disagreed with their religious superiors and, consequently, with Roman Catholic canon law. Lying at the heart of this disagreement were incompatible views of what composed the temporal and spiritual spheres of parish life and who, lay persons or priests, should have control over the affairs within each sphere. Many lay Catholics, therefore, did not want to control their parish priest so much as they wanted to limit his power to the spiritual affairs of the parish. According to their reasoning, the parish’s temporal affairs – the administration of parish finances, property and employees (including priests) – were best left to the supervision of its parishioners in the form of a board of duly-elected trustees. As long as the priest did not interfere in the work of the trustees, the trustees would not interfere in the priest’s running of the parish’s spiritual affairs. If, however, a priest should wander where he is not welcomed (i.e., if he should try to wrest control of parish finances and property from his parishioners), the trustees held the power to cut his wages and, if deemed necessary, let him go.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) defined the “Church” as “the People that God gathers in the whole world.”²⁰ The 1983 *Code of Canon Law for the Latin Church* contains an entire book devoted to “The People of God.”²¹ In this book, “the

²⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1993).

<http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p123a9p1.htm> Accessed 09/17/14.

²¹ *Code of Canon Law for the Latin Church* (1983). <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_PU.HTM> Accessed 09/17/14.

Christian faithful,” or “the people of God,” are assigned obligations and given rights (Canons 208-223).²² Notably, Canon 208 decrees the “true equality” “among all the Christian faithful.”²³ This designation was the result of many years of adaptation and thus does not reflect the American Roman Catholic Church in the pre-Vatican II era. The First Book of the 1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code* of the Roman Catholic Church, “Laws Concerning Persons,” describes “Laws Concerning the Clergy” first, “The Religious” secondly and, lastly, “The Laity.” In this latter section, “the laity” is not specifically defined as in the 1983 *Code*, but instead implied to be those who, through baptism, became subjects of the Roman Catholic Church.²⁴ In the nineteenth century, Roman Catholic bishops defined “the Church” in terms of their own power as prelates within it. Their authority, although granted from the pope through their consecration, was divinely given. Many nineteenth-century lay Catholics understood “the Church” to be, unlike their contemporary prelates and much like post-Vatican II Roman Catholic theology, the “People of God.”²⁵ This clash in conceptions of the makeup of “the Church” stoked trustee-centered conflicts in the early nineteenth century as much as it did in the late nineteenth century. Disagreements about the laity’s role in regard to parish-level governance were most stark between bishops and lay persons, especially those most involved in the running of their parishes such as trustees. Priests were frequently caught between the two perspectives, but most often sided with their superiors.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Canon 87 (1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*).

²⁵ Carey, *People, Priests, and Prelates*, 281.

4.3 PROPERTY

Generally, Christian churches create legal rules in order to regulate property according to “the doctrine of Christian stewardship.”²⁶ Thus, Christians are to make use of their ownership of temporal goods in a way that advances the mission of their respective churches. By virtue of their high position in the hierarchical structure of the Roman Catholic Church, bishops are endowed with the authority to determine what actions may or may not advance the mission of the Church. Roman Catholic canon law reflects the influence of the doctrine of Christian stewardship in its assignment to bishops the task of ensuring that the property of their diocese is used properly in accordance with the Church’s mission. As made clear in decrees drafted at nineteenth-century provincial and plenary councils, American Roman Catholic prelates resolved that the trustee system did not help advance the Church’s mission and so would be best abolished. However, achieving this task proved not as easy as legislating against it. It would take nearly a century to substantially rid the American Church from the annoyance that was the trustee system.

Nineteenth-century clerical leaders within the Roman Catholic Church in America repeatedly tweaked internal legislation on ecclesiastical property in order to more or less disenfranchise the laity. In this way, bishops were further empowered at the expense of the laity, which fits with the trend of the centralization of power within the nineteenth-century Church. Current Roman Catholic canon law dictates that anyone who would question a bishop’s authority to administer ecclesiastical property would do so in error. “Such an error,” one canon law scholar explains, “would deny the

²⁶ Norman Doe, *Christian Law: Contemporary Principles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 310.

theological element that forms the *intellectus* of canon law, yielding legalism rather than the unity of law and theology.”²⁷ This “error” was evident even to late-nineteenth-century working-class immigrant lay Catholics, who would certainly not have been students of canon law. As the Roman Catholic Church in America institutionalized, the power of its prelates increased. By the time large numbers of Catholics from eastern and southeastern Europe arrived in the United States in the late nineteenth century, there was little doubt of bishops’ high degrees of authority within the American Church and, on the other hand, the lowly position of the Church’s newest members.

“The serpentine trial of trusteeism winds its vicious way along the highroad of canonical legislation from 1791 to 1884,” reads a 1932 summary of the provincial and plenary councils of the American Roman Catholic Church held in Baltimore.²⁸ This source, published under the *imprimatur* of New York’s archbishop, captures the distaste for the trustee system, which long lingered among leadership within the American Church.²⁹ Even a cursory review of the nineteenth-century councils shows a persistent concern among American Church leadership for the issues surrounding property ownership and oversight, including, trusteeism. Although it was not condemned by name in any decrees, clerical leaders recognized trusteeism as a problem at the Roman Catholic Church in America’s first synod in 1791.³⁰ Almost every successive council of the American Church concerned the ownership and oversight of church property in some way. Clearly, it was on the minds of Roman Catholic clerical

²⁷ John J. Coughlin, *Canon Law: A Comparative Study with Anglo-American Legal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 124.

²⁸ Peter Guilday, *A History of the Councils of Baltimore (1791-1884)* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1932), 88.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ “Councils of Baltimore,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume 2 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2003): 42.

leadership during the early years of the Church's organization in the United States and, due to the difficulties the Church faced in establishing fuller control over its property, well into the twentieth century. Such difficulties manifested themselves in two primary ways: 1.) Catholic lay (and sometimes clerical) resistance to the Church's intentional weakening of the trustee system; and 2.) Civil courts' frequent rulings in favor of lay trustees.

In *People, Priests, and Prelates*, Patrick Carey describes the First Provincial Council of Baltimore (1829) as "the most important single event in marking the decline of clerical and lay influence and in signaling the beginning of the growth of exclusive episcopal power in the government and management of the church."³¹ All successive plenary councils, he explains, "reinforced" the strong anti-trusteeism of this council's decrees.³² Council attendees' primary goal was to create a uniformity of Church discipline, motivated by their concern over trusteeism, especially given recent conflicts in Philadelphia, New York City and elsewhere.³³ The fifth and sixth decrees of the First Provincial Council of Baltimore (1829) addressed trusteeism most directly:

Since lay Trustees have frequently abused the right given to them by the civil power, to the great detriment of religion, and not without scandal to the faithful, we most earnestly desire [*maxime optamus*] that no church shall be erected or

³¹ Carey, *People, Priests, and Prelates*, 214.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ In letters sent to Archbishop Ambrose Maréchal (Baltimore) in 1827, Bishop John England (Charleston, SC) urged the Church's leader to call a council to address trusteeism, which he described as, for example, "the evils which unfortunately do exist" in "The deranged and unsettled state of the American Church." [John England letters to Maréchal, April 26, 1827 and June 25, 1827 quoted in Guilday, *A History of the Councils of Baltimore*, 83.] England later changed his view of the trustee system when he resolved a trustee-centered conflict within his own diocese with the drafting of a constitution. This constitution established a trustee system (with the bishop of the *ex-officio* president) in order to oversee finances and properties within the Roman Catholic Diocese of Charleston. This solution to trusteeism, although advocated by England as a useful adaptation of the Church to the American democratic context, did not catch on among his fellow prelates. Instead, they grew more opposed to the trustee system as trustee-centered conflicts continued throughout the early nineteenth century.

consecrated in future unless it is assigned by a written document to the Bishop in whose diocese it is to be erected, for divine worship and the utility of the faithful, wherever that can be done...³⁴

This dictate – that no new Roman Catholic parish be erected without the diocesan bishop’s approval or consecrated without the conveyance of its title into his name – was reiterated by successive councils of the American Church. It attempted to stem the power afforded to lay Catholics not only by the trustee system, but also by the tradition of lay initiative in the establishment of Roman Catholic parishes. Lay Catholics, nevertheless, repeatedly challenged this requirement throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century.

The decrees drafted at the provincial councils held in Baltimore in the early nineteenth century show a conscious concern among members of the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy for the ownership and oversight of church property. The issue of trusteeism and property ownership again appeared among eleven decrees drafted by the Third Provincial Council of Baltimore (1837), as well as in Bishop England’s pastoral letter.³⁵ The Fourth Provincial Council of Baltimore (1840) decreed that movable and immovable ecclesiastical property was to be held in the bishop’s name and passed from one bishop to the next via wills and testaments in accordance with civil law.³⁶ This decree was modified at the Fifth Provincial Council of Baltimore (1843) by a decree requiring newly installed bishops to compose wills that would secure such a transfer of ecclesiastical property according to state law.³⁷ The same council also

³⁴ Patrick J. Dignan, *A History of the Legal Incorporation of Catholic Church Property in the United States (1784-1932)*, dissertation, The Catholic University of America (Washington, D.C., 1933), 145. Quoted and translated from *Concilia Provincialia Baltimori habita ab anno 1829 usque ad annum 1849* (Baltimore, MD: 1851), 65-66.

³⁵ “Councils of Baltimore,” 44.

³⁶ Coughlin, *Canon Law*, 127.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

decreed that church property could be sold, mortgaged or leased only with the bishop's approval.³⁸ In other words, no lay person or priest was to have control of parish property.

The First Plenary Council of Baltimore was held in 1852 after Rome granted the request of the Seventh Provincial Council of Baltimore to sanction a plenary synod to address the needs of a larger Roman Catholic Church, no longer limited to the single diocese of Baltimore. Attendees of all three plenary councils (two more were held in 1866 and 1884) debated the issue of church property, including trusteeism. Authors of council decrees were careful to ensure the adherence of Roman Catholic canon law with American civil law. Decrees were adapted from one council to the next as challenges arose which proved ecclesiastical property law to be insufficient. In each council, attendees' concern for bishops' rights to property titles was evident. For example, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Baltimore, Francis Kenrick, stressed the issues of episcopal authority and obedience and the administration of church property in his pastoral letter written for the First Plenary Council of Baltimore (1852).³⁹ He wrote: "With these temporal things, thus separated from common purposes and set apart for the service of the sanctuary, the Church cannot allow any interference that is not subordinate to her authority."⁴⁰ Also, the Congregation of the Propaganda of the Faith specifically requested that attendees of the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore (1866) address the legal issues regarding church property.⁴¹

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ "Councils of Baltimore," 45.

⁴⁰ Dignan, *A History of the Legal Incorporation of Catholic Church Property in the United States*, 190.

⁴¹ "Councils of Baltimore," 46.

Although it was a reiteration of previous legislation, title nine of the decrees of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore (1884) came to be of particular concern to working-class immigrant Catholics in the late nineteenth century, because it stated that “the Fathers state the right of the Church as a perfect society on the basis of natural law itself, to possess property for the prosecution of its mission. It is ordered that the possessions of the Church be under the control of the bishop, who is entrusted with what is so much more precious, namely, the very souls of men.”⁴² In other words, bishops were to be the supreme administrators of all property within their dioceses. According to decrees passed by the council, Roman Catholic bishops could hold titles to church property in three ways: “as corporation sole, as trustee for the diocese, or as an individual with title in fee simple absolute.”⁴³

By legally establishing a corporation sole, all property within a diocese became that of one person: the bishop who served in the office of the corporation sole. In this way, diocesan property became not that of the bishop’s, but of a single incorporated office, which best ensured the smooth transfer of property ownership from one bishop to the next. Although the Church favored this method of property control, it was not legal in every state. In such instances, a bishop was to legally establish himself as a trustee of parish property, meaning he essentially replaced the role of trustees (lay and clerical) in the trustee system. This method was not foolproof: in some states bishops could function only as “dry” and not “active” trustees, meaning they held parish property titles only in trust for congregations. The fee simple method of property control also proved potentially dangerous due to the real possibility that a bishop could basically

⁴² Dignan, *A History of the Legal Incorporation of Catholic Church Property in the United States*, 223.

⁴³ Coughlin, *Canon Law*, 127.

steal church property. In 1911, the Sacred Congregation for the Council eliminated this option. From then on, bishops were to hold church property titles as, preferably, a religious corporation or corporation sole or, in cases where such an arrangement was impermissible, as a trustee.⁴⁴

Lay Catholics' claims of church ownership and the power of administration of parish property and finances, therefore, directly conflicted with Roman Catholic canon law. The American Roman Catholic Church's "problem" with trusteeism, however, would not be so easily solved by its internal governing system (e.g., decrees passed via church councils). Lay Catholics held legal titles to parish property in many parishes, which they administered, along with parish finances, through the widely used system of trustees. Lay Catholics challenged Roman Catholic bishops legally by, most often, suing for rights to parish property. Lay resistance to giving up the control they believed they rightfully enjoyed over parish property provided the strongest obstacle to the implementation of property-related decrees passed by the provincial and plenary councils of Baltimore. Another obstacle, which varied from state to state, was American civil law. In the nineteenth century, adjudicators of civil law were generally not sympathetic to the hierarchical (and foreign) structure of Roman Catholic canon law. It would take decades, especially in some states, for U.S. civil law to permit the strong level of control the Roman Catholic Church in America exerted over its property by the 1980s.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

4.4 CIVIL LAW VS. CANON LAW: LEGAL STRATEGIES IN PENNSYLVANIA

No matter how Roman Catholic clerical leaders produced legislation in order to regulate lay ownership and administration of ecclesiastical temporalities, the Roman Catholic Church in America had to function within the legal system of the United States. Since each state had its own property laws, the governing bodies of the American Roman Catholic Church could only provide guidelines to its bishops as to how they were to manage property within their dioceses. The nineteenth century was, therefore, a period of trial and error as prelates strategized how to best secure control of church property within their dioceses. For many, especially bishops, doing so was best for the Church and advancing its mission. From the perspective of many lay Catholics, however, bishops gained control of parish property at their expense.

The 1850s saw a significant rise in anti-Catholicism, as Irish (read Catholic) immigration spiked due to the devastation wrought by the Great Famine (1845-1852). Having taken control of several state legislatures, the Know Nothing Party influenced the passage of much nativist (read anti-Irish, anti-German, anti-Catholic) legislation. Such legislation included bills specifically aimed at regulating ecclesiastical property in order to favor lay Catholics over bishops. Ironically, much of the seemingly “nativist” legislation regarding church property actually empowered lay Catholics such that many “anti-Catholic” laws garnered considerable support from the Catholic public.

Sometimes, such as in Buffalo, New York, Roman Catholic lay trustees lobbied their state legislators to draft bills that would mandate boards of trustees and hamper bishops’ abilities to transfer ecclesiastical property to their successors in office. Roman Catholic bishops (most notably John Hughes in New York) tried to prevent such

legislation from passing. A bill passed by the New York state legislature on April 4, 1855 set a precedent for other states to follow. A couple weeks later, the Pennsylvania legislature passed a similar act, which stayed in effect largely unchanged well into the twentieth century. Under this law, bishops could hold property titles only as a dry trust for congregations, meaning they essentially had no power to control ecclesiastical property, because that power was vested in the congregations. In the 1850s and 1860s, several states passed legislation that mimicked New York's 1855 act, including some that specifically prevented bishops from becoming corporations sole.

Soon after the nativist fervor of the 1850s and 1860s died down, many state legislators modified or repealed such laws in ways that favored Roman Catholic bishops over lay trustees. Many states, including New York, then allowed bishops to hold property as corporations sole, thereby securing the transition of ecclesiastical property from one bishop to the next. However, such legislative developments did not prevent lay Catholics in those states from challenging bishops' control of parish property in the late nineteenth century. Across the United States, lay Catholics were generally at a disadvantage in taking up legal disputes with the American Roman Catholic Church, which, by the late nineteenth century, was a well-organized and powerful religious institution. Many late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century legal disputes within the American Roman Catholic Church were taken up by recent immigrants, who generally had little experience with the U.S. legal system and limited resources to pay for legal assistance. Their efforts show a strong resolve to adapt their Church to their

vision of it. Working-class immigrant lay Catholics demonstrated, through their many legal efforts, that they envisioned a Church that would best function with a strong element of local lay control.

Throughout the nineteenth century, U.S. civil courts ruled in favor of lay trustees as well as in favor of Roman Catholic bishops in church property right disputes: there is no discernible national pattern. Instead, rulings differed widely from state to state. Due to the variety of civil law across states and the difficulty of researching old legal cases heard in lower courts, a comparison of lay legal strategies in the battle for control within Roman Catholic parishes across the United States is beyond the scope of this project. However, Pennsylvania, the state with the most Roman Catholic schisms in the history of conflict in Catholic America, is certainly worthy of closer examination. Focusing on a single state will demonstrate the successes both of lay strategies and of the Roman Catholic Church, which, after a century of legal wins and losses, eventually triumphed in the battle for property control. Although this battle was often tedious and victories rarely lasting, it is significant to note how fervently lay Catholics fought for the legal control of their parishes. Their actions show the high value they placed on such control.

A 1731 act gave religious societies, incorporated or unincorporated, the legal capacity to hold real estate in the state of Pennsylvania.⁴⁵ Therefore, Roman Catholics, through their membership in a Roman Catholic parish, had their right to hold titles to realty protected by law. In 1855, the Pennsylvania state legislature passed an act that

⁴⁵ Act 1731, 1 SmL. 192, 10 P.S. § 121.

gave religious societies, in addition to their right to own real estate, absolute ownership of their property, as long as their use of it did not divert from the purpose for which it was originally intended:

Whenever any property, real or personal, shall hereafter be bequeathed, devised or conveyed to any ecclesiastical corporation, bishop, ecclesiastic, or other person, for the use of any church, congregation, or religious society, for religious worship or sepulture, or the maintenance of either, the same shall not be otherwise taken and held, or enure, than subject to the control and disposition of the lay members of such church, congregation, or religious society, or such constituted officers or representatives thereof.⁴⁶

In other words, as long as a Roman Catholic parish continued to function as a Roman Catholic parish, its members had the right to alienate parish property as they desired to do so. Roman Catholics could, therefore, sell, mortgage or lease church property as long as they did so in a way that maintained the original function of their religious society, which was to be a Roman Catholic parish. This law clashed with Roman Catholic canon law, which, as decreed by the provincial and plenary councils of Baltimore, vested total control over real estate within a diocese in the office of that diocese's bishop.

In *Krauczunas v. Hoban* (1908), the Pennsylvania Supreme Court evoked the Act of April 4, 1855 and ruled that civil law predominated over canon law when the two conflicted and that the state did not recognize any Roman Catholic bishop's secular power.⁴⁷ This case – in which the conveyance of parish property deeds was central – inspired lay Catholics elsewhere in Pennsylvania to initiate legal proceedings against their bishops in order to gain or regain legal ownership of their parish property. Roman Catholic prelates – as demonstrated by Archbishop Michael Hoban's actions in the

⁴⁶ Act of April 26, 1855, P.L. 330, § 7; Cited in *Mazaika v. Krauczunas*, 233 Pa. 138 (1911).

⁴⁷ Coughlin, *Canon Law*, 126.

conflict – steadfastly guarded their control of diocesan property. Even when they lost in court – as Hoban lost in Scranton – bishops, equipped with the power to censure and penalize, continued the fight for control within their dioceses. The examination of three Pennsylvania state court cases in three different cities (Scranton, Shenandoah and Mahanoy City) will demonstrate how lay Catholics framed their arguments in their attempts to legally secure parish property and how Roman Catholic prelates fought their efforts by using the American civil legal system.

4.4.1 SCRANTON

In 1893, organizers of Saint Joseph Roman Catholic Church (est. 1892, Lithuanian) in Scranton, Pennsylvania, bought land and had the deed made in the names of five men who were acting for the congregation, including two as parish officers. In 1896, the deed was conveyed to the same five men, identified as “trustees,” but without noting the name of the congregation. That same year, the deed was conveyed to the “Providence Lithuanian Catholic Congregation”: the same five men signed the deed, but not as “trustees.” Six months later, the deed was conveyed to the Roman Catholic bishop of Scranton, William O’Hara, “in trust for the congregation.” Thus, the congregation, which organized under its own initiative four years earlier, adhered to canon law and Title IX of the decrees of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore by transferring the deed for its land to the diocesan bishop. In 1901, after finding itself in debt after building a church, the congregation sought to get a \$10,000 loan. In the process of reviewing the parish’s property deeds (three total for three adjacent plots of land enhanced by a church building) in order to secure the loan, a diocesan lawyer

discovered that the conveyance of the deed to Bishop O'Hara in 1896 was, as described in a Pennsylvania Supreme Court opinion: "improperly executed," "a somewhat crude effort" and "so imperfect as to cast a serious doubt on the validity of the transfers."⁴⁸

In February 1901, the congregation held a meeting in order to resolve the newly discovered problem with the parish deeds.⁴⁹ In order to secure the \$10,000 loan, a majority of parishioners agreed to transfer the deeds to Michael Hoban, who succeeded O'Hara as bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Scranton following O'Hara's death in 1899. The five men who, it had been recently discovered, still held the parish's deeds as trustees, refused to comply. In August, the men were forced to convey the deeds to Hoban as the result of a court action filed by the faction within the congregation who supported the deed transfer. What most motivated the majority of parishioners in taking legal action against the former deed-holding trustees – either the desire to comply with the bishop's wishes/canon law or the need to secure the loan – is not clear from extant sources. According an official diocesan history, Saint Joseph parishioners sought the \$10,000 loan in order to enlarge the church, which was immediately found to be too small.⁵⁰ However, this reason conflicts with the facts laid out in the 1908 Pennsylvania Supreme Court opinion, from which it can be deduced that without the loan, the parish risked bankruptcy and, quite possibly, closure.

Five years passed without much disturbance related to the deeds matter in Saint Joseph until "considerable dissatisfaction" arose in the parish in 1906.⁵¹ According to

⁴⁸ *Krauczunas v. Hoban*, 221 Pa. 213 (1908).

⁴⁹ The Supreme Court of Pennsylvania found that a majority of the members of Saint Joseph were represented at the meeting [*Krauczunas v. Hoban*, 221 Pa. 213].

⁵⁰ John P. Gallagher, *A Century of History: The Diocese of Scranton: 1868-1968* (Scranton, PA: The Diocese of Scranton, 1968), 254. This history includes the *imprimatur* of the bishop of Scranton.

⁵¹ *Krauczunas v. Hoban*, 221 Pa. 213.

the 1908 court opinion, many parishioners objected to the pastor and, thus motivated, expressed a desire to transfer the parish's deeds from Hoban to ten newly elected trustees. At a meeting held in July 1906, the congregation decided to seek the incorporation of their religious society and passed a resolution to direct the trustees "to take such action, in law, equity, or otherwise, as may be necessary to secure the conveyance to them as trustees for said society of the legal title to any and all property now held by any other persons as trustee or trustees for this society."⁵² Hoban refused to comply with the trustees' wishes, which, from his perspective, clashed with canon law. At an October meeting, the new trustees were "instructed to bring legal proceedings" against the bishop in order to force him to convey the parish's deeds to them.⁵³ Thanks to a legal action filed against Hoban by the trustees in the Common Pleas Court of Lackawanna County, Hoban received a summons to a January hearing in order to explain why he would not reconvey the parish deeds to the trustees. In response, Hoban excommunicated the trustees by a decree read by Saint Joseph's pastor at two Masses on December 16. According to a diocesan history written sixty years after the incident, the decree of excommunication "was applicable to everyone who sought to embarrass the diocesan administration through their ill-advised litigation."⁵⁴ Although the bishop's move weakened his opposition's support, it did not completely break their commitment to their cause.

When the Common Pleas Court of Lackawanna County dismissed the trustees' complaint – a victory for Hoban and his supporters – the trustees appealed to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. Hostility grew between the two factions within the

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Gallagher, *A Century of History*, 257.

parish, which Hoban tried to calm with the replacement of the pastor. On May 11, 1908, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court reversed the lower court's decision – a clear victory for the trustees and a humbling defeat for Hoban. According to Justice John Stewart's opinion, it did not matter that Roman Catholic canon law required the parish's property to be deeded to the bishop: whoever held the deeds, bishop or not, functioned only as a dry trustee. The real power to control the property was vested in the congregation, as long as they did not divert its uses from its original function as a Roman Catholic parish. The court ordered Hoban to reconvey all parish property he held to the duly-elected trustees.

In response, Hoban did as he was directed by court but continued his fight with the trustees, using weapons available to him as Ordinary of the Diocese of Scranton: he placed the parish under interdict. The interdict was read by Saint Joseph's pastor from the pulpit on Sunday, May 31, 1908 and went into effect at midnight, June 1:

...The court has decided that the Catholic bishop of Scranton must hand over to a band of excommunicated apostates the deed of the Catholic Church of St. Joseph's. As the church cannot be used for any other worship than Catholic worship, and as it is intolerable to hold Catholic services in a church controlled by members who despise the church and her laws, and who have lost their Catholic faith, I am exceedingly pained to be obliged to place the Lithuanian Catholic Church of St. Joseph's under interdict until the members of the congregation shall turn these faithless men out and place the church once more under the care of the bishop of the diocese of Scranton, according to the laws of the Catholic church...no Catholic services of any kinds shall be held therein, nor shall any Catholic enter therein without incurring ecclesiastical censure, until the interdict shall be removed.⁵⁵

When faced with a loss in the civil courts, Hoban reverted to ecclesiastical penalties in order to continue his battle for control of parish property within the Roman Catholic Diocese of Scranton. He labeled his opponents (i.e., the duly-elected parish trustees) as

⁵⁵ *Mazaika*, 233 Pa. 138.

“apostates” “who have lost their Catholic faith.” He placed the burden of resolving the conflict on the parishioners: the interdict would not be lifted until they rid the parish of “these faithless men” (i.e., the parish’s legal trustees) and reconveyed the parish’s property to him. Facing such an ultimatum – either obey the bishop or go without a church – it is not surprising that a majority of parishioners favored the reconveyance of parish property to Hoban. After all, the interdict left the congregation without a place to worship and therefore spiritually cut off from the sacraments, including Mass and the Eucharist. The predicament they faced had grave spiritual consequences and, as Hoban made clear, was up to them to resolve.

Very much wanting their church reopened, Saint Joseph parishioners filed a legal action in the Common Pleas Court of Lackawanna County against the trustees. In November 1910, the court ordered the trustees to reconvey the parish property to Archbishop Hoban. Again, the trustees appealed to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. The court did not question Hoban’s authority to place the parish under interdict, but found doing so “a manifest attempt to deny the congregation freedom of action with respect to property of which, under the law of the land, it was sole owner.”⁵⁶ In other words, the meeting called in order to elect Hoban as parish trustee was a clear attempt by him “to circumvent the law.”⁵⁷ Hoban’s position, that he held the right to control the parish’s property under Roman Catholic canon law, did not hold up in court, because it conflicted with civil law. In court, Hoban’s point of view was clarified in his answers to questions about the rights of Roman Catholic lay members in regards to property ownership and control. “Under the general law of the church,” he testified, “the lay

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

people have not the right to control.”⁵⁸ In another response, he asserted that lay Catholics had no right to hold property as trustees for their congregation.⁵⁹ In reality, they did have this right under civil law. Hoban, it seems from his testimony, did not want to acknowledge this important truth. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court found that the resolution to reconvey parish property to Hoban was “a clear attempt to invest the bishop with authority over the congregation’s property which the law expressly forbade.”⁶⁰ The court did not grant anyone the power to force the trustees to reconvey parish property to Hoban and so once again reversed the lower court’s decision.⁶¹

Hoban maintained the interdict on Saint Joseph and took no action until 1912, when some parishioners started exploring options available to them with respect to friendly relations they established with the nearby schismatic church, Saint Stanislaus PNCC (est. 1897), and its leader, Rev. Francis Hodur. Not surprisingly, Hoban sprang to action upon hearing reports that not only were schismatic priests allowed to enter and minister in the shuttered church, but also that one such priest, Rev. Stanislaus Mickiewicz, was actually hired as pastor. Hoban’s supporters, who had been worshipping with their pastor in a temporary chapel since the interdict, filed a legal action against the trustees in the Common Pleas Court of Lackawanna County. The court decreed that Hodur, Mickiewicz and their “agents” “be and are permanently enjoined and restrained from preaching, conducting religious worship, or in any wise officiating as ministers” and “and intermeddling in any manner with the temporal

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Novicky v. Krauczunas*, 245 Pa. 86 (1914).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

affairs of the congregation.”⁶² The trustees appealed to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, which again reversed the lower court’s decision, interpreting the injunction “as another attempt to circumvent the law and take from the congregation the right of control and ownership in its own property.”⁶³ “What we do decide, and all we decide,” reads the opinion by Justice John Stewart, “is that, because evidence in the case makes it apparent that the purpose of the bill is to accomplish indirectly that which we have repeatedly declared may not be done, the plaintiffs in the bill have no standing to ask equitable relief.”⁶⁴ Since the parish was still under interdict, the higher court ruled, the plaintiffs must appeal first to the bishop.

Hoban, in response to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court’s refusal to grant an injunction against the “non-Catholic” use of Saint Joseph, lifted the nearly five-year-old interdict on the parish as well as the trustees’ sentences of excommunication. Doing so put the parish back into normal use and once again under Hoban’s jurisdiction as Ordinary of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Scranton. Saint Joseph parishioners who supported Hoban again filed a petition with the Common Pleas Court of Lackawanna County against the “non-Catholic” uses of the parish; the trustees again appealed the lower court’s decision to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. In April 1914, Justice John Stewart ordered the trustees – who, by aligning with the PNCC, had diverted the parish property from its purpose for use as a Roman Catholic Church – to leave the parish and hand over all property to Bishop Hoban. As a result, the schismatic Lithuanian National Catholic Church, which functioned under the jurisdiction of the PNCC was created. For the vast majority who did not join the new Independent

⁶² *Novickas v. Krauczunas*, 240 Pa. 248 (1913).

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Catholic church, but remained members of Saint Joseph, an important lesson was learned: in the end, civil legal strategies afforded to lay Catholics might be no match for the powerful Roman Catholic Church hierarchy.

4.4.2 SHENANDOAH

The 1908 legal precedent from the Scranton controversy inspired lay Catholics elsewhere in Pennsylvania to take action in order to legally ensure lay ownership of parish properties. In the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia, for example, doing so involved lay Catholics convincing courts to appoint lay trustees after the death of Archbishop Patrick John Ryan in 1911. Since Pennsylvania law allowed Roman Catholic bishops to hold property deeds only in trust for congregations and not as corporations sole, church property became vulnerable in the time between the death of a bishop and the appointment of a successor. Therefore, a bishop's death, such as Ryan's in 1911, provided lay Catholics an opportunity to legally gain or regain control of their parish property. Pennsylvania lay Catholics' legal efforts to seek the titles to their churches in the wake of the Supreme Court's 1908 decision show that immigrant lay Catholics were not only paying attention to, but also inspired by, their brethren's legal strategies in their battles for control within their parishes.

The "Lithuanian" faction within Saint Casimir Roman Catholic Church (Polish/Lithuanian) finally found success with Archbishop Ryan, who in 1889, after fourteen years of failed diplomacy with the archbishop's office, permitted what his predecessor, James Frederick Wood, refused: the establishment of Saint George, a Lithuanian ethnic parish. As Edmund Francis Prendergast succeeded Ryan as

archbishop in 1911, an opportunity surfaced which encouraged Saint George members to more solidly regain control of their parish property. In 1891, Saint George founders had no choice but to accept Ryan's appointment as trustee of parish property – if they refused, Ryan could have refused to bless the parish or appoint them a priest. When the archbishop died, lay Catholics took action to legally, and thus, in their minds, justly take over ownership of the parish. Prendergast was appointed auxiliary bishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese Philadelphia in 1895 and so was likely already familiar with the troublesome Catholic community of Shenandoah when he was named archbishop of the archdiocese in May 1911 and installed as such in June.

In May 1911, the Schuylkill County Court of Common Pleas granted an injunction against Saint George trustees for taking up collections in the church and for interfering with the pastor's issuance of burial permits for the parish cemetery. The trustees appealed to the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, which affirmed the lower court's decision in 1913. Referencing the Pennsylvania state legislature Act of April 4, 1855, the judge ruled: "So far as the canons of the church are in conflict with the law of the land, they must yield to the latter; but when they do not so conflict they must prevail."⁶⁵ This meant that parishioners had the right to control parish finances in order to maintain parish property, but all other funds were to be under the pastor's administration. More significantly, the higher court also ruled that "the absolute ownership of property of St. George's Lithuanian Roman Catholic Church of Shenandoah is in the congregation, subject to their control."⁶⁶ This ruling was very

⁶⁵ *Ryan v. Dunzilla*, 239 Pa. 486 (1913).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

much also in the spirit of the Pennsylvania Act of 1855, which Pennsylvania Supreme Court justices used in 1908 to decide *Krauczunas v. Hoban* in favor of parish trustees.

In a January 1912 meeting, Saint George parishioners authorized the parish president and secretary to petition the Schuylkill County Court of Common Pleas to appoint new trustees of their choosing “in place and stead of Most Reverend Patrick John Ryan, deceased.”⁶⁷ In their petition, representatives of the congregation of Saint George claimed that the church title was taken in Archbishop Ryan’s name “in trust for the uses and purposes” of the congregation. Since Ryan died, they explained, “the congregation authorized its President and Secretary to file a petition in its name to have trustees appointed in the place and stead of deceased trustees.”⁶⁸ This petition demonstrates its composers’ (i.e., working-class immigrant lay Catholics) understanding of Pennsylvania civil law. Regardless of whether or not they knew if they had the right to seek the reconveyance of their parish property under Roman Catholic canon law (they did not), the petitioners strategically turned to the civil courts in order to regain what they most desired: legal control of their parish. Archbishop Prendergast, Ryan’s successor, filed a legal document asking the petition to be dismissed on grounds that the meeting at which the petition was authorized was illegitimate. The lower court found Prendergast’s legal arguments consisted of “only a legal opinion, without giving any facts upon which the opinion is based” and so appointed the new trustees as requested.⁶⁹ Prendergast appealed the case to the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania.

⁶⁷ *In re St. George’s Lithuanian Roman Catholic Church of Shenandoah*, 244 Pa. 410 (1914).

⁶⁸ To Archbishop Prendergast from Anthony A. Hirst, attorney, March 10, 1914, Prendergast Collection, 71.788H, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

⁶⁹ *In re St. George’s*, 244 Pa. 410.

The state high court affirmed the lower court's ruling in March 1914, finding that the petition "averred sufficient facts" to empower the court to appoint the new trustees in accordance with the Pennsylvania state legislature Act of April 4, 1855 and the Act of April 14, 1828.⁷⁰ In strong language, the court berated Prendergast's poor argument against the trustees:

It is a settled rule of pleading in this state that an answer to a petition must not only be responsive, but must also aver facts, and not conclusions of law. The respondent must meet by his answer all the material facts averred in the petition, and it is for the court, and not for the respondent, to determine the law upon the facts averred. The principle of pleading is so well established as not to need the citation of authorities to sustain it.⁷¹

In short, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia lost. Certainly, Prendergast was not happy with the court's decision, nor were his lawyers. In a typed note to the archbishop clipped to the court's opinion delivered on March 9, 1914, the archdiocese's Shenandoah-based attorney wrote: "It certainly does seem hard to get any justice out of the Supreme Court as at present constituted."⁷² The loss in court was an embarrassment to the archbishop who, thanks to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court's decision, was to face similar legal challenges by numerous lay trustees within his archdiocese.

4.4.3 MAHANOEY CITY

According to parish meeting minutes, the lay Catholics' legal success in Shenandoah inspired many in Saint Joseph Roman Catholic Church (Lithuanian) in Mahanoy City,

⁷⁰ The Act of April 14, 1828 permitted members of a church to petition the court for new trustees in the event of a trustee's death even without an authorization granted by a congregational meeting.

⁷¹ *In re St. George's*, 244 Pa. 410.

⁷² To Archbishop Prendergast from Anthony A. Hirst, attorney, March 10, 1914.

Pennsylvania, to likewise seek legal ownership of their parish property.⁷³ In March 1913, the Philadelphia County Court of Common Pleas ruled in favor of the congregation in a dispute with their pastor: although the pastor had the right to collect pew rents, “the property belongs to the parish...they can take care of all the buildings, and they should rule over them.”⁷⁴ In June 1913, emboldened by the lower court’s recent ruling in the Shenandoah case and the parish’s own recent legal success in Philadelphia, seven male lay members of Saint Joseph (elected by the congregation in February) petitioned the Schuylkill County Court of Common Pleas to be appointed trustees in place of Archbishop Patrick John Ryan, deceased. Using the same argument he made in the Shenandoah case, Archbishop Edmund Francis Prendergast claimed that the trustees were elected illegally and so had no standing to be appointed trustees by the court. Citing one of the decisions arising from the earlier Scranton case, *Krauczunas v. Hoban* (1908), the court found that the selection of the trustees was “legal” and “proper.”⁷⁵ The judge compared the case to Shenandoah’s *Ryan v. Dunzilla* (1913), which ruled that parishioners of Saint George Roman Catholic Church had “absolute ownership” of parish property.⁷⁶ Therefore the court appointed the seven men as trustees, thus forcing Prendergast to reconvey all parish property deeds to them.

In addition to the archbishop’s dissent, the court also received “several petitions” objecting to such an appointment, claiming that “they are not proper persons to be placed in control of the property.”⁷⁷ According to the petitions, the court-appointed

⁷³ From the Court of Common Pleas of Schuylkill County, May 18, 1914, Prendergast Collection, 71.114Ach, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*

⁷⁵ *Ibid*.

⁷⁶ *Ryan v. Dunzilla*, 239 Pa. 486.

⁷⁷ From the Court of Common Pleas of Schuylkill County, May 18, 1914, Prendergast Collection, 71.113Ach, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

trustees did not call a proper meeting of the congregation in order to authorize their petition and, in addition, collected signatures for their petition not at the parish, but at a local United Mine Workers meeting.⁷⁸ Therefore, they argued, since the petition was signed by parishioners not in good standing in the church, it was illegitimate. This argument – as seen in the Schuylkill County Court of Common Pleas’ ruling to appoint the new trustees and in the Pennsylvania Supreme Court’s upholding of the lower court’s ruling in *In re St. George’s Lithuanian Roman Catholic Church of Shenandoah* (1914) – would not have stood up in court. The Pennsylvania State Legislature Act of April 14, 1828 permitted church members to petition the court for new trustees in the event of a trustee’s death, regardless of whether the petition was authorized in a congregational meeting or not.

In their petitions to the Schuylkill County Court of Common Pleas, the trustees’ opponents claimed that the court-appointed trustees and their supporters were motivated out of a dislike of the pastor, whose salary they quit paying and whom they recently attempted to replace with a “Schismatic priest.”⁷⁹ The petitioners pointed out that the court-appointed trustees (who were friendly with “Socialists”) desired to take control of the parish’s real estate “contrary to the rules and regulation, uses, canons, discipline and requirements of the Roman Catholic Church.”⁸⁰ This last argument, that the court-appointed trustees were diverting the use of parish property from its original function, was the exact argument that the Roman Catholic Diocese of Scranton found successful in *Novicky v. Krauczunas* (1914), decided one month prior. By claiming that the men who the court appointed parish trustees fraternized with schismatics and were

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

really motivated out of their desire to “make the congregation independent of the Archbishop of Philadelphia and to further a spirit of opposition to the priest and the authorities of the church,” the petitioners suggested that the men violated the Pennsylvania State legislature Act of April 4, 1855.⁸¹

Although the petitioners assumed that the title of the parish’s property passed from Ryan to his successor, there was no clarity on this issue. In reality, the former archbishop held the parish titles only in trust for the congregation. The real control of the property, as delineated in the Act of April 4, 1855, belonged to the congregation. Therefore, since Ryan died, the congregation could, under the Act of April 4, 1855 and the Act of April 14, 1828, rightfully petition the court for the appointment of new trustees of their choosing. Describing themselves as “The loyal members of the parish,” the trustees’ opponents petitioned the court to dismiss the request to appoint the seven men as trustees. Feeling it his “duty” to appoint the trustees as requested, the Court of Common Pleas of Schuylkill County judge pointed out that “those appointed are mere naked dry trustees and really have no power for any practical purpose.”⁸² Therefore, from a legal perspective, “the court failed to see why it was considered worth while to object to the appointment.”⁸³

In all three legal disputes in Pennsylvania (Scranton, Shenandoah and Mahanoy City), just who held church property deeds in his name made little difference legally, because Pennsylvania state law vested control of ecclesiastical property in congregations. In each case, the courts pointed out the dry (i.e., not active) nature of

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² To Anthony Hirst, attorney, from J. Whalen, attorney, May 22, 1914, Prendergast Collection, 71.116Ach, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

trusteeship in the state of Pennsylvania. Regardless of the reality that state law did not grant trustees real power over ecclesiastical property (e.g., the power to sell, mortgage or lease), lay Catholics and bishops persisted in their efforts to secure trusteeship of parish property. Although legal battles for property deeds may have seemed petty to adjudicators of civil law, their occurrence reflects the utmost value lay Catholics, clerics and prelates placed on property ownership in accordance with civil law. The fervency with which each side fought in every case shows that it did matter who legally owned parish property. Most property-centered conflicts within the Roman Catholic Church in America boiled down to incompatible views of what was best for the Church and its mission: lay or clerical control of ecclesiastical temporalities. Even if they could find victory in the civil courts, however, lay Catholics were defenseless against the censures and penalties they risked incurring from their religious superiors for their disobedience.

4.5 CANON LAW: CRIMES AND PENALTIES

All Catholics knew bishops had the power to censure and penalize anyone within the Roman Catholic Church, lay or clerical, who disobeyed them. Without knowing the variety of such censures, and penalties, or the specific actions that could be construed as disobedience, lay Catholics were generally careful to maintain at least an outward appearance of reverence for their religious superiors. Certainly, immigrant working-class lay Catholics did not have a reading knowledge of canon law, which was not even codified until the twentieth century. However, they did have a working knowledge of obedience and disobedience, thanks to the didactic work of parish priests who

frequently touched on such subjects in their sermons. Such teachings became more prevalent in the midst of parish- and diocesan-level conflicts as priests and bishops threatened disobedient troublemakers with specific censures or penalties unless they changed their ways and obeyed. Therefore, lay Catholics were well aware of the possibility of undesirable, and perhaps frightful, outcomes if they should be labeled disobedient. Anxiety, more than a sincere belief in the righteousness of being obedient, motivated many lay Catholics to follow the dictates of canon law, as they incompletely understood them. It is quite possible that fear, more than any other factor, prevented the great majority of lay Catholics from straying too far into the realms of disobedience, including conflict and schism.

Since Roman Catholic canon law was not codified until the twentieth century, it was not easily accessible in the nineteenth century, even to clerical leaders who had to rely on Church scholars' collections of conciliar decrees and papal teachings for reference. The decrees of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), although promulgated almost two hundred fifty years before the consecration of America's first Roman Catholic bishop, were the most influential source on canon law until 1917. In that year, after thirteen years of preparation, a new, concise and user-friendly canon law was promulgated. The *Codex Iuris Canonici Pii X Pontificis Maximi iussu digestus Benedicti Papae XV auctoritate promulgatus*, or the 1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*, contained two thousand four hundred fourteen (2,414) canons in five total books.⁸⁴ Finally, canon law could be summarized into handy reference books for anyone (though most intentionally

⁸⁴ "History of Canon Law," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume 4 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2003): 55. This code is named after its initiator, Pope Pius IX, and its finisher, Pope Benedict XV.

for priests) to cite, such as *The New Canon Law: A Commentary and Summary of the New Code of Canon Law* (1918), written in the English language by Rev. Stanislaus Woywod.⁸⁵

At four hundred thirty-three total pages, Woywod's "summary" was not only a handy reference book in its own time, but also is an excellent reflection of nineteenth-century developments in canon law as the Roman Catholic Church grappled with modernity.⁸⁶ The first three books are summarized most completely: 1.) "General Principles of Canon Law;" 2.) "Laws Concerning Persons;" and 3.) "Sacred Things." According to the author's preface, he "summed up" books four and five "very briefly," focusing on "the most important legislation contained therein."⁸⁷ Unfortunately, these more heavily edited books would be of the most interest to readers interested in the history of conflict in Catholic America: 4.) "Canonical Trials;" and 5.) "Offences and Penalties." A modern reader can only guess why Woywod thought it best to omit much of these two final books, thus encouraging their restricted access to more privileged clerics literate in Latin. The Fourth Book includes parts on court procedures (e.g., "Manner of Avoiding Canonical Trials," "Criminal Trials," "Matrimonial Cases" and "Cases Against Sacred Ordination); beatification and canonization; and procedures for penal sanctions (e.g., for removing and suspending pastors). The Fifth Book includes parts on "Offences;" "Penalties" (e.g., censures, excommunication, interdicts and suspensions); and "Penalties for Individual Crimes." Interestingly, the revision of the

⁸⁵ Stanislaus Woywod, *The New Canon Law: A Commentary and Summary of the New Code of Canon Law* (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, Inc., 1918). This publication was reprinted several times, even after its author's death in 1941 (most recently in 1957 as *A Practical Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*).

⁸⁶ Not including the index or appendix, the text ran 392 pages. When compared to the many pre-1983 canon law texts and commentaries, which typically ran to almost 1,000 pages, Woywod's "summary" was quite accessible. Woywod was a German-born, American- and Roman-educated and United States-serving Franciscan Roman Catholic priest.

⁸⁷ Woywod, Preface.

1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code* that led to the currently-in-use 1983 *Code of Canon Law for the Latin Church* eliminated nearly sixty percent of canon law regarding ecclesiastical crimes and punishments (cut from two hundred twenty Canons to eighty-nine).⁸⁸ In some ways, this change reflects the Roman Catholic Church's success in defeating many of its earlier enemies, many of whom were internal.

"A censure," according to the 1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*, "is a penalty by which a subject (by Baptism) of the Church is deprived of some spiritual benefits, or of benefits connected with spiritual matters, because of obstinate violation of some law of the Church, until such time as he repents and obtains absolution."⁸⁹ There are three types of censures in Roman Catholic canon law: excommunication, interdict and suspension.⁹⁰ "Excommunication," as defined in the *Pio-Benedictine Code*, "is a censure by which a person is excluded from communion with the faithful."⁹¹ Therefore, once excommunicated, a person is spiritually cut off from his parish community. Apostates, heretics and schismatics are almost automatically excommunicated, as well as those who publish, distribute, defend or knowingly possess censured literature, including that written by apostates, heretics and schismatics.⁹² The ecclesiastical censure of excommunication was also reserved for "those who retain unjustly Church property of any kind, either by themselves or through others, or who thwart those who have a right to the income from Church goods."⁹³ Likewise, those who knowingly alienate more than \$600 worth of church property without proper permission were to also incur a

⁸⁸ Book VI of the 1983 *Code*, "Sanctions in the Church," includes Canons 1311 to 1399 (89 total). In comparison, the Fifth Book of the 1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*, "Offences and Penalties," includes Canons 2195 to 2414 (220 total).

⁸⁹ Canon 2241 (1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*).

⁹⁰ Woywod, *The New Canon Law*, 361.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 362.

⁹² Canon 2314 and Canon 2318 (1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*).

⁹³ Canon 2346 (1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*).

censure.⁹⁴ However, what constituted just or unjust possession or alienation of church property was open to interpretation: lay Catholics' interpretations frequently clashed with those of priests and bishops, who were more knowledgeable of canon law and more concerned for its preservation. Lay Catholics did not so much blatantly protest canon law, but more so acted in ways which they felt should be compatible with it.

An "interdict," unlike excommunication, allows "the faithful" to remain "in communion with the Church," although they are forbidden access to certain "sacred functions," which are enumerated in canon law.⁹⁵ For example, an interdict could be placed on a parish which would halt all activities, including the celebration of Mass. "Suspension" is specific to members of the Roman Catholic priesthood, who are thus "suspended" from their priestly capacities, with or without an explanation from the bishop.⁹⁶ Merely being suspected of heresy, in addition to receiving orders from someone "publicly excommunicated, suspended or interdicted, or from a notorious apostate, heretic, [or] schismatic" is grounds for clerical suspension. Likewise is "conspiring against the authority" of any Church superior or turning to "any lay authority" to help "obstruct" ecclesiastical justice, both which can also incur a sentence of excommunication.⁹⁷

Interestingly, there is no one part or section in Woywod's 1918 summary of Roman Catholic canon law devoted to schismatics or other such troublemakers. Considering that the largest growth in Independent Catholic parishes occurred in the 1920s, Roman Catholic leadership certainly still viewed schism as a very real threat in

⁹⁴ Canon 2347 (1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*).

⁹⁵ Woywod, *The New Canon Law*, 365.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 340. Canon 1477 (1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*).

⁹⁷ Canon 2315; Canon 2373; Canon 2331, § 2; Canon 2336, § 1 (1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*).

the early twentieth century. However, according to the Church's own histories, the threat was manageable. Hence, rules for dealing with "schismatics" are not concentrated in the 1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*, but are instead scattered throughout the text, lumped together most often with "heretics" and "apostates." It is significant to note how canon law defines these troublemakers:

A baptized Christian, who calls himself a Christian, yet obstinately denies or calls into doubt any of the truths to be believed by Divine and Catholic faith, is a heretic; if he abandons the Christian faith altogether he is called an apostate; if, finally, he refuses to be subject to the Supreme Pontiff, or to have communication with the members of the Church subject to the Roman Pontiff, he is a schismatic.⁹⁸

The consequences an individual faces once labeled a "heretic," "apostate" or "schismatic" are severe. For example, heretics and schismatics are not permitted to receive any sacraments.⁹⁹ Holy Mass may not be said in their churches.¹⁰⁰ They may not serve as sponsors for baptisms or confirmations.¹⁰¹ They are forbidden to marry Roman Catholics for fear of "danger of perversion for the Catholic party and the offspring."¹⁰² They are also to be denied ecclesiastical burial.¹⁰³ In other words, heretics, apostates, schismatics, as well as the excommunicated are to be spiritually and physically cut off from the Roman Catholic Church, even in death.

Priests, especially those who worked in a community with a Roman Catholic schism (e.g., a Polish National Catholic parish), regularly admonished their parishioners to not only disassociate themselves from such troublemakers, but also to refrain from even speaking about them. Canon law specifies that "the faithful" are "to

⁹⁸ Woywod, *The New Canon Law*, 272. Canon 1325 (1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 150. Canon 731 (1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 166. Canon 823 (1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 156 and 161. Canon 765 and 795 (1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 214. Canon 1060 (1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 253. Canon 1240 (1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*).

avoid” communicating with any excommunicated person, making exceptions only for close family members.¹⁰⁴ Thus, social ostracism typically accompanied one’s spiritual ostracism from the Roman Catholic Church by a sentence of excommunication. The burden of releasing oneself from ecclesiastical censure lies on the individual so censured. For example, one suspected to be a “heretic” or to be propagating “heresy” must prove his own innocence “within six months after the first punishment” or be deemed a heretic and face the appropriate penalties as dictated in canon law.¹⁰⁵ One is not “kicked out” of the Church when censured, but penalized in order to compel his repentance (i.e., obedience) and, after doing so, is permitted to return to the Church. Ecclesiastical censures, and the threat of ecclesiastical censures, functioned ideally to persuade Church discipline. According to canon law, they “should be inflicted rarely and with great prudence.”¹⁰⁶ Therefore, neither the clergy nor the laity should take the act of censuring, as well as receiving a censure, lightly.

According to the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, the Roman Catholic Church “has the innate and proper right to coerce offending members of the Christian faithful with penal sanctions.”¹⁰⁷ Just what constitutes an offence or, in other words, a crime, is more clearly explained in the 1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*. According to this older version of canon law, a crime (delictum in Latin), juridically, is “an external and morally sinful violation of a law to which is attached a canonical sanction or penalty, at least indeterminately.”¹⁰⁸ “An ecclesiastical crime is defined,” in other words, philosophically, “as an act or omission which is unjust, is imputable to its author, and which disturbs

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 365. Canon 2267 (1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*).

¹⁰⁵ Canon 2315 (1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*).

¹⁰⁶ Canon 2241 (1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*).

¹⁰⁷ *Code of Canon Law for the Latin Church* (1983). Canon 1311.

¹⁰⁸ Woywod, *The New Canon Law*, 343. Canon 2195 (1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*).

the social order of the Church.”¹⁰⁹ Just what actions may qualify as a disturbance to the Church’s social order is left to the determination of its most powerful regional overseers: bishops. According to canon law, “Superiors who have the power to make laws or impose precepts, can also attach penalties to the law of precept.”¹¹⁰ Thus bishops (functioning as local ordinaries), as well as the pope, Church councils, sacred congregations and certain vicars and superiors of religious communities, could penalize Catholics, lay and clerical, as they saw fit according to their interpretation of ecclesiastical criminal law.¹¹¹ Taking the canon law definition of ecclesiastical crime into consideration, it is thus understandable how a bishop could interpret conflict, and especially schism, as a distortion of the Church’s social order. As Ordinary of his diocese, a bishop was charged with preserving order and so could use his power to censure and penalize in order to carry out this, in his eyes, sacred duty.

According to Roman Catholic canon law, the imputability (i.e., responsibility) of a crime increases as does the office of the person who committed the crime or against whom the crime was committed.¹¹² For example, a priest will incur greater penalties than a lay person for the same crime; likewise would a bishop be penalized harsher than a priest. This is because priests and bishops “possess a certain added dignity in the community” and therefore upon them “rests an added burden not to violate the law, and thus to endanger the salvation of others by their bad example.”¹¹³ Also, a crime committed against a bishop will be penalized more harshly than the same crime

¹⁰⁹ John J. McGrath, *Comparative Study of Crime and Its Imputability in Ecclesiastical Criminal Law, and in American Criminal Law*, dissertation, Catholic University of America (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1957), 11.

¹¹⁰ Woywod, *The New Canon Law*, 350. Canon 2220 (1917 *Pio-Benedictine Code*).

¹¹¹ McGrath, *Comparative Study of Crime and Its Imputability*, 13.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 95.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 70.

committed against a priest or a lay person. This is because attacking a bishop, who functions as a “father” to his ecclesiastical “family” (i.e., his diocese) is akin to attacking “the ecclesiastical society.”¹¹⁴ Therefore, to challenge a bishop (invested with the power to censure and punish those he deems guilty of criminal actions), for example, with a lawsuit, carried a risk with great spiritual consequences.

4.6 CONCLUSION

Following a post-Tridentine style of preaching, nineteenth-century Roman Catholic priests favored two particular themes in their sermons: “the necessity of personal salvation” and “the primacy of the Roman Catholic Church.”¹¹⁵ The latter theme was “more prevalent” in the United States (a primarily Protestant country) than in Europe.¹¹⁶ Immigrant Catholics, therefore, would have been preached to about this topic more than they would have been in their homelands. Regularly listening to sermons about the primacy of the Roman Catholic Church would have encouraged a stronger awareness among the laity of their place within their hierarchical Church: the bottom. However, their lowly place within their Church and in society was not important, their priests would have frequently assured them: heaven would be their reward for their piety and obedience.

Lay Catholics’ widespread acceptance of their humble role within their increasingly powerful Church was perhaps the Roman Catholic Church in America’s

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹¹⁵ Jay P. Dolan, *The Immigrant Church: New York’s Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 148.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

main bulwark against internal conflicts. In other words, for most lay Catholics, conflict was simply not worth it: their personal salvation, which hinged on their piety and obedience, was more important. Besides, as they were well aware, a fight between the powerless laity and the powerful clergy and Church hierarchy would most surely end in the laity's defeat and, possibly, their own damnation. Therefore, even if legal strategies to secure control within their parishes seemed promising, the spiritual and, consequently, social penalties Catholics would surely incur in challenging a bishop's divinely-given authority were generally enough to discourage lay-initiated lawsuits. It is perhaps not surprising then that most schism-inducing conflicts started as property disputes between lay Catholics (sometimes with clerical support) and bishops. This trend led to significant Independent Catholic movements across immigrant America, which will be examined in chronological order in the next chapter, in the cities of Cleveland, Ohio (1894); Chicago (1895); Buffalo, New York (1895); and Scranton, Pennsylvania (1897).

CHAPTER 5 SCHISM

“Father Aust’s Warring Polish Parishioners,” was the headline in the *Scranton Republican* on August 10, 1896.¹ Similarly sensational notices followed that month, highlighting the unrest among Polish Roman Catholics in Scranton, the northeastern Pennsylvania anthracite coal mining and steel manufacturing center: “They Will Be Arrested,” “Police Use Clubs” and “Those Wrangling Church Factions.”² The scattered incidents of conflict between members of Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary Roman Catholic Church over their pastor, Rev. Richard Aust, escalated into a “free-for-all” on the street in front of the church one Sunday in late-August 1896.³

Great crowds were coming from all sides to the Polish Church of Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary on Prospect Avenue. They were whispering mysteriously that strange things were to happen in the Church. Some of them saw in dreams a bloody handwriting, the biblical words: mane, tekem, ufarim – only they did not know for whom this terrible end was coming, for the people or for the priest or for the Bishop himself; – whilst others were saying that something was groaning in the mines and the words were heard; “Be not afraid; Be not afraid!”⁴

¹ John P. Gallagher, *A Century of History: The Diocese of Scranton: 1868-1968* (Scranton, PA: Diocese of Scranton, 1968), 215.

² *Ibid.*

³ Theodore Andrews, *The Polish National Catholic Church in America and Poland* (London: S.P.C.K., 1953), 26.

⁴ “Mane, tekem, ufarim” (typically written “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin”) refers to “the writing on the wall” in Daniel 5 in the Old Testament. A disembodied hand mysterious appeared and wrote these words on a wall which Daniel interpreted for King Belshazzar of Babylon as an omen predicting the fall of his kingdom. Francis Hodur wrote this account in 1901, five years after the incident and four years before the PNCC formally split from the Roman Catholic Church. This reference, however, seems to predict the PNCC’s break with the Roman Catholic Church and the challenge the PNCC will make to the Roman Catholic Church’s dominance in immigrant communities.

Around the little Church, there stood a great mass of people, interested, excited, and restless. All the time, they were discussing that neither the priest nor the bishop would listen to the modest petitions presented to them by the committee.

All at once, somebody gave the command: "Brethren, stand like a wall between the parsonage and the Church. Do not allow the priest to go to the altar. He is not worthy to offer the Holy Sacrifice. We have built the Church; we are on our own ground."⁵

The author of this account, Rev. Franciszek (Francis) Hodur, led two hundred fifty families to break away from the Roman Catholic parish and build their own, declaring, "All who are dissatisfied and wronged in Scranton should organize and build a new church, with full claims to property ownership."⁶ Several months later, Hodur traveled to Rome with a National Church (*Kościół Narodowy*) program, outlining suggestions for reforming the American Roman Catholic Church, but was rejected. Upon returning to Scranton, a parishioner asked what he was going to do. Hodur answered: "I shall not return under the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Bishop. I shall not return to the Roman Church."⁷ His followers agreed: "Then we shall not return either."⁸ According to an account of the incident: "A holy ardor overwhelmed the gathering. They all stood up: men and women; raised their hands to show their indomitable [sic] decision and repeated: 'We shall not return!'"⁹ In 1904, at the First General Synod of the Polish National Catholic Church (PNCC), lay and clerical

⁵ Gallagher, *A Century of History: The Diocese of Scranton*, 216-217. Excerpt from Francis Hodur, *The New Ways* (Scranton, PA: Polish National Catholic Church, 1901).

⁶ Leon Grochowski, "History of the St. Stanislaus P. N. C. Parish of Scranton, Pennsylvania," in *Album, 1897-1957: Sześćdziesiątej Rocznicy Polskiego Narodowego Katolickiego Kościoła* (Scranton, PA: Polish National Catholic Church, 1957).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

delegates decided to break decisively with the Roman Catholic Church and elected Hodur as their first Prime Bishop. Today, the PNCC survives as the only extant schism of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States and Canada.¹⁰

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Although the PNCC's longevity is unique in the history of conflict and schism in Catholic America, schism itself was not unusual in the late-nineteenth- and early twentieth-century northeast and central midwest United States. The PNCC is, however, unusual in American Catholic history. One reason for this discrepancy lies in a major research problem: long-lived schisms (i.e., lasting longer than ten years) were small in number; also, little historical evidence survives regarding short-lived schisms (i.e., lasting a few months to several years). The PNCC schism, therefore, appears to many scholars as an odd deviation from the seemingly internally untroubled narrative of the Roman Catholic Church's adaptation to and acceptance in modern America. In this dominant paradigm of American Catholic history, the Church's biggest enemies are external, not internal; Roman Catholics fought with Protestants, not with each other. Expanding the understanding of schism in Catholic America to include not only schismatics, but also near-schismatics and sympathizers, uncovers a history riddled with potentially schism-inducing unrest. True, conflicts rarely led to schism, and schisms were most often short-lived, but the underlying cause for both conflict and schism was the same: the battle for control within the Roman Catholic parish. This

¹⁰ Although the PNCC officially broke away from the Roman Catholic Church in 1904, it recognizes 1897 as its foundation year. On March 14, 1897, Saint Stanislaus Bishop and Martyr was organized; Hodur celebrated the church's first Mass on March 21.

common struggle within Catholic America was very much part of the immigrant experience, and schism is the most powerful evidence of its remarkable impact on American religious life.

5.2 SCHISMATIC MOVEMENTS

Out of the many attempts at Independentism in American Catholic history, only four can be characterized as “movements”: Rev. Anton Franciszek (Anthony Francis) Kołaszewski’s in Cleveland, Ohio (1894-1909); Rev. Stefan (Stephen) Kamiński’s in Buffalo, New York (1895-1911); Rev. Anton (Anthony) Kozłowski’s in Chicago (1895-1907); and Rev. Franciszek (Francis) Hodur’s in Scranton, Pennsylvania (1897-today). These four movements – all led by men ordained as Roman Catholic priests, excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church for their “schismatic” activities and, through their own efforts, consecrated bishops in the Old Catholic Church – can be categorized as such thanks to their strong sense of building a national Independent Catholic Church. Originally motivated largely by an urge to reform Roman Catholicism in order to better fit its American context, all four movements found, or rather were forced to find, a solution to the same issues of control – lay control of the administration of parish property, finances and employees (especially priests) – in schism. None, however, strayed far from its founding members’ Catholic doctrinal and theological roots. Thus, all retained the word “Catholic” in their names: the American Catholic Church (Kołaszewski); the Polish Catholic Church of America (Kamiński); the Polish Old Catholic Church (Kozłowski); and the Polish National Catholic Church (Hodur).

Only Hodur's Independent Catholic movement – the PNCC – exists today. Kołaszewski's movement ended with his reconciliation with the Roman Catholic Church in 1909. Kozłowski's and Kamiński's ended with their untimely deaths (in 1907 and 1911, respectively). Hodur avoided not only reconciliation with Rome, but also an early grave – he died in 1953 at age eighty-eight (Kozłowski died at age fifty; Kamiński at fifty-two).¹¹ Leading his Church well past its shaky foundational period, the PNCC's first Prime Bishop served as the strong leader without which all other Independent Catholic movements faded. Many churches affiliated with Kołaszewski's, Kozłowski's or Kamiński's Independent Catholic movements survived their loss of leadership by joining the PNCC. Likewise, Independent Catholic churches originally unaffiliated with any of the four movements found longevity in the PNCC. Most other Independent Catholic churches eventually dissolved, while many reconciled with Rome, thus sending most members back into the Roman Catholic fold. These common conclusions to Independentism – dissolution and reconciliation – have caused it to almost vanish from history. It is thanks to the PNCC's longevity that piecing together the story of schism in Catholic America is possible. Placing the Church within the context of Independentism – and not on a schismatic island unto itself – is a crucial step toward understanding how schism fits within the history of conflict in Catholic America.

5.2.1 CLEVELAND, OHIO (1894-1907)

Born in the Russian-ruled partition of Poland in 1851, Anton Franciszek (Anthony Francis) Kołaszewski was ordained a Roman Catholic priest in Cleveland and installed locally as pastor of Saint Stanislaus Roman Catholic Church (Polish) in 1883. He

¹¹ Kołaszewski died in 1910, at age 59 (one year after reconciling with the Roman Catholic Church).

resigned from his pastorate in 1892 under pressure from the bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, Ignatius Horstmann, with whom he feuded. In 1894, Kołaszewski returned to Cleveland to lead his disaffected former parishioners to Independentism.¹² On May 3, Saint Stanislaus members gathered, decided to break away from their Roman Catholic parish, selected officers and a parish committee and drafted a constitution for their new Independent Catholic church – the Immaculate Heart of Mary.¹³ In June, Bishop Horstmann excommunicated Kołaszewski from the Roman Catholic Church. In August, Rev. Joseph Rene Vilatte (an itinerant Old Catholic bishop based in Green Bay, Wisconsin) consecrated Kołaszewski a bishop in the Old Catholic Church. In his sermon at the ceremony, Vilatte preached: “Yes, yes, we are Catholics. Let us ever remain so, never relinquishing an iota of our Catholic dogma even though we do insist on our right to hold property in our own names.”¹⁴

Immaculate Heart’s constitution placed control of parish property and finances in the hands of lay members represented by an elected board of trustees.¹⁵ Thus, the document, which established the democratic governance of the new parish, satisfied grievances that compelled former members of Saint Stanislaus towards Independentism. From the start of their Independent Catholic church, Kołaszewski and his supporters had national ambitions: their church would become a movement.¹⁶ Stressing lay ownership and maintenance of parish property and finances, lay selection of priests, freedom of the press and parental choice between parochial and public

¹² Charles R. Kaczynski, “What Mean Ye by These Stones?: Cleveland’s Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish and the Construction of a Polish American Rhetoric,” *Polish American Studies* 55, no. 2 (1998): 31.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Excerpt from “Attacked. Angry Poles Charge on a Religious Procession,” *The Cleveland Leader* (Cleveland, OH), August 20, 1894.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 46.

education for their children, the Society of the Immaculate Heart of Mary sent fifty thousand copies of its platform to Independent Catholic churches and troubled Catholic communities across the United States.¹⁷ Ideally, the parish's constitution would serve as a model for other Independent Catholic churches.¹⁸ It was clear to Kołaszewski and his followers that a nationwide confederation of Independent Catholic churches was not only a real possibility, but also was very much desired and needed by Catholics across the country.¹⁹

According to Kołaszewski's followers, their movement would attract a majority of Polish ethnic Roman Catholic parishes, yet would not be limited in appeal by ethnicity.²⁰ Kołaszewski invited, according to a newspaper report, "all Catholics who are dissatisfied with the government of the Church of Rome, but not with the faith" to send delegates to a convention in order to organize a national Independent Catholic Church.²¹ In August 1894, forty Independent Catholic churches (from Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas and Wisconsin) sent representatives to Cleveland.²² Speaking at the meeting, Bishop Vilatte said: "We should be Americans for America and not for the Roman Catholic Church. Our church is founded on American principles and American power."²³ Many delegates returned home after the convention with a renewed sense of strength and purpose for their local Independent Catholic movements. For example, Independently-

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 48 and 51.

²⁰ "Independent Catholics," *The Evening Herald* (Shenandoah, PA), July 9, 1894.

²¹ "To Organize a National Polish Church," *New York Times*, July 22, 1894.

²² "Polish National Catholics," *Aberdeen Daily News* (Aberdeen, SD), Aug. 10, 1894; "Polish Catholics," *Dallas Morning News* (Dallas, TX), Aug. 22, 1894. Specifically: Buffalo, NY; Freeland, Nanticoke and Pittsburgh, PA; Jersey City, NJ; Baltimore, MD; Chicago, IL; Milwaukee, WI; Detroit, MI; Omaha, NE; St. Louis, MO; and Dallas, TX.

²³ "Polish Catholics," *Sun* (Baltimore, MD), Aug. 22, 1894.

minded Catholics in Freeland, Pennsylvania, formed an Independent Catholic church based on Immaculate Heart's constitution in September 1894.²⁴ Although the Freeland church would soon dissolve – as too would Independent Catholic churches in Omaha, St. Louis and Dallas – all other Independent Catholic churches represented at the 1894 convention would eventually find longevity within the PNCC.

In less than two years, Kołaszewski's church had three thousand members.²⁵ However, on September 24, 1896, Rev. Stanislaus Kamiński (Buffalo, New York) won the election for bishop of the Roman Catholic Church of America, beating the other two candidates – Kołaszewski and Rev. Anton Kozłowski, leader of an Independent Catholic movement in Chicago. After less than three years since his church's break with Rome, Kołaszewski gave up his ambitions to lead a national Independent Catholic movement and retreated into his home parish of Immaculate Heart. In January 1909, Kołaszewski reconciled with the Roman Catholic Church, and Immaculate Heart rejoined the Roman Catholic Diocese of Cleveland.²⁶ The following year, he passed away. As a consequence, among the four Independent Catholic movements (led by Kołaszewski, Kamiński, Kozłowski and Hodur), Kołaszewski's group is the most likely to be omitted from the history of Independentism.

²⁴ Joseph W. Wiczerzak, "On Two Trails: The Polish Independent Parish of Freeland, Pennsylvania: Father Paul Kaminski," *PNCC Studies* 11 (1990): 30. Freeland, PA, is 350 miles east of Cleveland.

²⁵ "Want to be Methodists," *Bismarck Tribune* (Bismarck, ND), May 6, 1896.

²⁶ The PNCC has had at least five parishes in the city of Cleveland, OH (est. in 1914, 1915, 1932, 1941 and 1954; plus one Slovak parish, est. date unknown). All were established after Kołaszewski's Independent Catholic movement ended in 1909.

5.2.2 BUFFALO, NEW YORK (1895-1911)

Rev. John Cantius Pitass organized Buffalo's first Polish ethnic Roman Catholic parish, Saint Stanislaus Bishop and Martyr, in 1873. Much like Rev. Vincent Barzyński – whose parish in Chicago, Saint Stanislaus Kostka, was the only Polish ethnic Roman Catholic parish larger than Pitass's in the United States – Pitass wanted his parish to grow, but not to split. In the early 1880s, Saint Stanislaus parishioners organized, raised money, bought land and started building a new church. The bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Buffalo, Stephen Ryan, following Pitass's advice, rejected the organizers' request for a priest, even though they were willing to transfer legal ownership of the church to the bishop. Turning to Pitass's former assistant priest, Rev. Anthony Klawiter, for help, organizers of the new church successfully appealed to the Sacred Office for the Propagation of the Faith in order to get permission to build Saint Adalbert. Thus in 1886, after overcoming their earlier defeat and the destruction of their first church building, Saint Stanislaus parishioners were finally successful in their efforts to break away from Rev. Pitass. In response, Pitass encouraged the harassment of Saint Adalbert parishioners, which provoked Klawiter's leaving in 1890 after the second church building mysteriously burnt down.²⁷

In 1894, Bishop Ryan appointed Pitass to serve as Buffalo's dean for all five Polish ethnic Roman Catholic parishes, thus giving him power to interfere in the affairs of parishes outside his own. His recommendation of a new pastor for Saint Adalbert ignited a conflict within the parish; many parishioners saw the priest as Pitass's lackey. Thus, disaffected Saint Adalbert parishioners separated from Saint Adalbert, causing

²⁷ Joseph W. Wiczerzak, "Religious Independentism among Polish Catholics in Buffalo, New York," *PNCC Studies* 8 (1987): 73-74.

an uproar in the community. Faction-fighting led to rioting, which led to their expulsion from their parish by Bishop Ryan. Meeting in a Polish National Alliance hall in Buffalo in August 1895, the former Saint Adalbert parishioners voted to form an Independent Catholic parish: Holy Mother of the Rosary. One thousand people attended the new church's first Mass, celebrated outside on a rainy day in September 1895 by Rev. Anton Kołaszewski.²⁸

Holy Mother of the Rosary's parish history, recorded in the PNCC's sixtieth anniversary book, recounts its origin as follows:

It was the result of a struggle with the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church over the ownership of St. Adalbert's Parish and its method of administration. When the deed to the church property was delivered to the bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese, hundreds of discontented parishioners left the parish and the Roman Church. They called a mass meeting, elected a committee and resolved to organize a new Polish Church under the name of Holy Mother of the Rosary and to be independent of Rome.²⁹

An earlier history of the Independent Catholic church describes "the incessant struggles" between lay Catholics and priests and bishops over property rights in Buffalo.³⁰ One particularly violent episode occurred on February 2, 1895, when police greeted Saint Adalbert parishioners intending to celebrate Candlemas at their church with billy clubs.³¹ Although the seemingly excessively brutal police action is not specifically explained, the history implies that police interference was provoked by parishioners' attempts to "defend their property" against actions taken by Bishop Ryan

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 75-76.

²⁹ *Album*, 1897-1957.

³⁰ *Księga Pamiątkowa "33": Polsko Narodowego Katolickiego Kościoła, 1897-1930, Scranton, Pennsylvania* (Scranton, PA: Polish National Catholic Church, 1930), 457.

³¹ *Ibid.*

to appropriate it.³² “Sadly,” the history reads, “the Polish people of Buffalo decided as a last resort to break with Roman and the Irish bishops and found an independent parish.”³³

Selected by parishioners, Rev. Klawiter returned to Buffalo to serve as the Holy Mother of the Rosary’s first pastor. However, after a few months, he fled the parish one night to escape “threats from the Romans.”³⁴ Rev. Anton Kozłowski – who was then trying to annex Kołaszewski’s Cleveland-centered Independent Catholic movement – travelled from Chicago to Buffalo to meet with the suddenly pastorless parishioners. Rejecting Kozłowski’s suggestion of pastors, the congregation instead selected a priest more aligned with Kołaszewski’s movement: Rev. Stefan (Stephen) Kamiński, who had most recently served as pastor of an Independent Catholic church in Freeland, Pennsylvania. In September 1896, less than six months after arriving in Buffalo, Kamiński was elected bishop of the Polish Roman Catholic Church of America, beating two other candidates – Kołaszewski and Kozłowski. The meeting of lay and clerical Independent Catholics was intentionally held at the same time as the First Polish Catholic Congress, which had on its agenda the condemnation of Independentism.³⁵ Thus Kamiński, the priest turned prelate, quickly found himself in charge of an Independent Catholic movement with national ambitions.

In 1898, Kamiński was consecrated a bishop in the Old Catholic Church by the same itinerant bishop who consecrated Kołaszewski: Joseph Vilatte. In October that same year, Bishop James Quigley, Ryan’s successor, excommunicated Kamiński from

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 458.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 459.

³⁵ Wiczerzak, “Religious Independentism,” 78.

the Roman Catholic Church. According to a newspaper report, the purpose of the sentence was to show schismatics, and potential schismatics, that “the independent Catholic Polish church does not belong to Rome.”³⁶ Thus Kamiński, like Kołaszewski, Kozłowski and Hodur, was thrust from reform to schism. However, similar to the three other Independent Catholic movement leaders, Kamiński stressed that his movement was indeed Catholic – The Polish Catholic Church.³⁷ Schismatic was a term used by opponents of Independentism. Independent Catholics did not embrace the label; they fought against it.

Kamiński’s rise as an Independent Catholic leader correlated with Kołaszewski’s fading into the background of Independentism. By the mid-1900s, Kamiński, Kozłowski and Hodur found their movements in a three-way race for membership. Kamiński fell to third place and Hodur emerged without any strong competitors following Kozłowski’s death in 1907 and Kamiński’s in 1911. All three attacked each other, mostly notably via the press. Sometimes, they took more direct actions to steer members away from other movements and toward their own. For example, some members of Holy Mother of the Rosary left when Kamiński arrived in 1895 and formed All Saints under Kozłowski’s movement. The church soon switched allegiances and aligned with Hodur’s movement. Hodur’s appointment of Rev. Klawiter as pastor – a move intended to be strategic – proved disastrous. Within three years, the wooden church closed and was broken up for use as kindling.³⁸ Likewise, Roman Catholic authorities took action to steer Holy Mother of the Rosary members back to the Roman Catholic Church. Most notably, Polish Franciscans organized a Roman Catholic church near the schism and actively

³⁶ “Bishop Excommunicated,” *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, MN), October 17, 1898.

³⁷ Wiczerzak, “Religious Independentism,” 80.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

campaigned against Independentism.³⁹ Both sources of opposition – Roman Catholic and Independent Catholic – worked to isolate Kamiński’s movement. By his death in 1911, Holy Mother of the Rosary became, in one scholar’s words, “an ecclesiastical island unto itself.”⁴⁰

According to the *New York Times*, fifteen thousand people attended Kamiński’s funeral on September 24, 1911.⁴¹ “Thousands” rushed at the casket as it was carried out of the church. Fifty police officers, mostly mounted and on alert “to preserve order,” protected the coffin and escorted the procession to the cemetery. According to the report, “four companies” of “the Bishop Kaminski society,” armed with rifles, guarded the hearse carrying the priest’s coffin. The procession included a brass band and a hearse pulled by four white horses, followed by two hundred school children and three thousand mourners. The article described how Kaminski’s church had been troubled for the past decade: “Dissentions split the congregation and many scenes close to riot have been enacted in the church and near its portals.”⁴²

Little evidence exists that would allow an accurate estimate to be made of membership in all churches affiliated with Kamiński’s movement. Like Kołaszewski’s, it failed to reach a sophisticated level of organization. *Warta (The Guard)*, a Polish-language newspaper published in Winona, Minnesota, reported on Kamiński’s activities, including his blessing of parishes in New York City, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Passaic, New Jersey, and Chicopee, Massachusetts.⁴³ These same regions sent representatives to Kozłowski’s meeting of Independent Catholic churches in 1894.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ “Attack Bishop’s Funeral,” *New York Times*, Sep. 25, 1911.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Wiczerzak, “Religious Independentism,” 81.

Later, they all also had at least one PNCC parish, which indicates that the churches eventually joined Hodur's movement. Three years after Kamiński's death in 1911, Holy Mother of the Rosary joined the PNCC; it became a cathedral in 1928 with the creation of the Buffalo-Pittsburgh Diocese.

5.2.3 CHICAGO (1895-1907)

In 1871, Resurrectionist priests were put in charge of Saint Stanislaus Kostka Roman Catholic Church (est. 1867) thanks to, in one's scholar's words, a "cozy alliance" between the Irish prelates who dominated the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago and the Congregation of the Resurrection.⁴⁴ In 1874, Rev. Vincent Barzyński became pastor of Saint Stanislaus and, as the Provincial of the Resurrectionists in Chicago, oversaw a large network of parishes.⁴⁵ In 1887, members of Saint Stanislaus, by the tradition of lay initiative, organized and raised enough money to purchase thirty-six lots just two miles away.⁴⁶ Forced to appeal to their former pastor – who functioned as the liaison between the Polish ethnic parishes in Chicago and the archbishop's office – for recognition, Saint Hedwig Roman Catholic Church organizers accepted Barzyński's brother Joseph (also a Resurrectionist) as pastor.⁴⁷ Seven years later, when Rev. Anton (Anthony) Kozłowski was hired by Barzyński as an assistant, Saint Hedwig members had grown exasperated with the authoritarian style of the Resurrectionist priests (including both Barzyńskis) who dominated Catholic Polonia in

⁴⁴ Joseph John Parot, *Polish Catholics in Chicago, 1850-1920: A Religious History* (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1981), 132.

⁴⁵ Barzyński's home parish, Saint Stanislaus Kostka Roman Catholic Church, had over 40,000 members (8,000 families) in 1897. It was the largest Polish ethnic parish in the United States.

⁴⁶ Mary Cygan, "Ethnic Parish as Compromise: The Spheres of Clerical and Lay Authority in a Polish American Parish, 1911-1930, *Charles and Margaret Hall Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism Working Paper Series*, series 13, no. 1 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1983), 2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Chicago.⁴⁸ Some, including Rev. Anton Kołaszewski from Cleveland, tried to capitalize on the unrest within the immigrant Catholic community of Chicago.⁴⁹ Saint Hedwig parishioners, however, found in Kozłowski a potential leader they had come to respect, admire and trust.

In late 1894, a petition to replace Barzyński with Kozłowski circulated throughout Saint Hedwig. After receiving the petition, the archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago, Patrick Feehan, dismissed Kozłowski. In January 1895, a committee representing the parish reported evidence of Barzyński's financial mismanagement of parish funds to the archbishop. Again, Feehan supported Barzyński. Having failed locally, Kozłowski and parish representatives travelled to Washington, DC, to meet with the apostolic delegate to the United States, Francesco Satolli.⁵⁰ Satolli was sympathetic, but Feehan already made plans to replace Barzyński as pastor. Before that occurred, however, Barzyński vacated his post after being threatened by a mob which surrounded his rectory one evening in early February. A few days later, another mob attacked the rectory, although it was then guarded by police, broke down the door and assaulted Barzyński's assistants.⁵¹ The violent mob actions caused Saint Hedwig's anti-Barzyński/pro-Kozłowski faction to lose the apostolic delegate's sympathy. When representatives again met with him, they asked for any non-Resurrectionist priest to replace Barzyński. When Barzyński's slated replacement and several supporters were

⁴⁸ Many former Saint Stanislaus parishioners brought with them the experience of a long-running feud between Vincent Barzyński and nearby Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Church, which earlier sought to escape the long reach of Barzyński's power.

⁴⁹ In the fall of 1894, Kołaszewski met with an Independently-minded parishioner of Saint Stanislaus Kostka (who wrote an anti-Barzyński pamphlet in 1892) in order to plan an Independent Catholic Church. [See Parot, *Polish Catholics in Chicago*, 110].

⁵⁰ Satolli was appointed the first delegate of the Apostolic Delegation in the United States in 1893. He served in that position until 1896.

⁵¹ One of Barzyński's assistants was slated to replace him as pastor, both assistants were Resurrectionists.

arrested for assault, Satolli decided to find a new pastor for Saint Hedwig. To Kozłowski supporters' shock – many thought he would surely be appointed pastor – another Resurrectionist priest was named to succeed Barzyński. Upon learning of this plan at Mass one Sunday in late February from the chancellor of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago, the church emptied in disgust.⁵²

Early one morning in mid-March 1895, Kozłowski supporters marched to Saint Hedwig and occupied the church, overtaking five police officers on guard. However, they surrendered to the police force that soon arrived. That night, Saint Hedwig's new pastor spoke at a meeting of the pro-Kozłowski/anti-Resurrectionist faction: all in attendance unanimously voted against Kozłowski's retention. In response, Archbishop Feehan closed the parish.⁵³ In May, Kozłowski's supporters started building their own church, just a five minute walk from Saint Hedwig. It was organized on two principles: "1.) That all church property would be in the possession of the parishioners; and 2.) That the pastor or their choice would be the Rev. Anthony Kozłowski."⁵⁴ By the end of the month, Kozłowski had registered the heads of one thousand out of Saint Hedwig's thirteen hundred families as members of All Saints Independent Polish Catholic Church of America.⁵⁵ His application to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago for recognition of the church was rejected.⁵⁶ On June 16, 1895, Kozłowski celebrated Mass in a rented storefront while a restraining order he helped to obtain prevented Saint Hedwig from reopening that same day. Since Archbishop Feehan rejected Kozłowski's request to consecrate All Saints, Kozłowski did so himself on August 12. On that day he

⁵² Parot, *Polish Catholics in Chicago*, 110-116.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁵⁴ *Album, 1897-1957*.

⁵⁵ Parot, *Polish Catholics in Chicago*, 117.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

announced his plans to sever ties with the Roman Catholic Church and to align with the Old Catholic Church, locally under Bishop Joseph Vilatte's jurisdiction. Fearing the growth of a larger movement and wanting to penalize Kozłowski for his continued disobedience, Feehan excommunicated Kozłowski on September 27, 1895. Two days later, the sentence was promulgated in all Slavic parishes in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Chicago: any Catholic who interacted with Kozłowski did so under threat of ecclesiastical penalty.⁵⁷

With a recommendation from Vilatte and approval from the European Old Catholic Council, Kozłowski was consecrated a bishop in the Old Catholic Church in Berne, Switzerland, on November 13, 1897.⁵⁸ Sending word from Europe to his followers, Kozłowski proudly proclaimed he "was consecrated as Bishop for the Polish Independent Catholics of North America."⁵⁹ In the words of a pastor of an Independent church in Chicago: "the Poles of this country will have a Bishop of their own. Rome would not give us one before we left the Church, and now we independents will have one."⁶⁰ Upon his return to Chicago, Kozłowski spoke of an "American Reformation," one that would most likely absorb most Polish Americans.⁶¹ The movement already had seventeen thousand members and spread outside its three parishes in Chicago to twelve other cities.⁶² Like Kołaszewski's Independent Catholic movement in Cleveland and Kamiński's in Buffalo, Kozłowski imagined his to grow into a national one: the

⁵⁷ "Cut Off," *Salt Lake Herald* (Salt Lake City, UT), Sep. 30, 1895.

⁵⁸ Bishop Herzog (Berne, Switzerland), Archbishop Gul (Utrecht, Netherlands) and Bishop Weber (Bonn, Germany) participated. [Parot, *Polish Catholics in Chicago*, 121].

⁵⁹ "Polish Bishop for America," *New York Times*, Nov. 17, 1897.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ "New Catholic Sect," *Tacoma Daily News* (Tacoma, WA), Dec. 20, 1897.

⁶² *Ibid.*

Polish Old Catholic Church of America. He described himself and his followers as “representatives of Americanism, which,” he explained, “despite the protestations to the contrary, is really the rampart of the Roman communion.”⁶³

Archbishop Feehan’s appointment of Saint Hedwig’s next pastor after the formation of All Saints was strategic: the priest had recently led a near-schismatic parish, Saint Hyacinth (est. 1894, Chicago), back into the fold of the Roman Catholic Church. In addition to this, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago vigorously and persistently attacked Kozłowski and his Independent Catholic movement. Most publicly, this was done through the archdiocesan weekly *The New World* as well as the Polish-language newspaper *Dziennik Chicagoski* (*The Daily Chicagoan*).⁶⁴ According to Joseph John Parot’s study of these periodicals, instead of examining the causes of the rise of Independentism in Chicago, editors instead “simply chose to use every available opportunity to mock the Independents.”⁶⁵ They also published open letters by local clerical leaders, such as Rev. Vincent Barzyński, who reminded readers that, for example: “All kinds of schism, history shows, becomes established in lies; it thrives on these poisons. These lies are spread as decayed matter is spread by bugs...The various forms of schism sin against the Holy Spirit...You all know the sins against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven in this world or in the next. That is why all schismatics become lost without penance.”⁶⁶ Likewise, this message was transmitted to Chicago Roman Catholics via their priests’ sermons in their native languages. The message was clear: fraternize with “schismatics” and risk eternal damnation.

⁶³ “Polish Catholic Communion to Build in Manhattan and Brooklyn,” *New York Times*, March 3, 1901.

⁶⁴ Parot, *Polish Catholics in Chicago*, 122.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 123. Quote from an open letter to the *Dziennik Chicagoski* (Chicago) by Vincent Barzyński, Nov. 13, 1895.

In April 1898, Kozłowski was excommunicated by Pope Leo XIII himself. According to the sentence, Kozłowski “rebelled against lawful authority,” claimed to be “the bishop of the independent Catholic diocese” as well as to have obtained “episcopal consecration from certain heretical bishops in Switzerland.”⁶⁷ Therefore, the pope stated that “the false Bishop Kozłowski be declared to have incurred the major excommunication reserved to the Roman pontiff in the constitution ‘Apostolicae Sedis.’”⁶⁸ The sentence was sent to all Roman Catholic bishops in the United States with the orders to have it read in their parishes.⁶⁹ In response, Kozłowski recognized the pope’s position as “the official head” of the Roman Catholic Church, but declared that “he has no power over us in any way.”⁷⁰ “We have twenty-seven churches in the United States,” he told reporters, “and assert the Roman Catholic Church for years been extorting money from our countrymen. It is to stop this that the independent Church had been formed.”⁷¹

In 1895, following his excommunication by Archbishop Feehan, Kozłowski threatened to sue the prelate for \$100,000 in damages for the harm it caused to his reputation.⁷² In August 1898, after Feehan and Cardinal Mieczysław Ledóchowski (prefect of the Congregation of the Propaganda) promulgated another sentence of excommunication following that of the pope’s, Kozłowski followed through on his threat: he sued for \$50,000 in damages.⁷³ To explain his legal action, Kozłowski stated that he feared his excommunication would make him “a social pariah, an outcast from the

⁶⁷ “Excommunicated,” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), June 19, 1898.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ “Polish Bishop Defiant,” *New York Times*, Aug. 10, 1898.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² “Priest Goes to Law,” *St. Paul Daily Globe* (St. Paul, MN), Oct. 2, 1895.

⁷³ “Wants \$50,000 Damages,” *Grand Rapids Herald* (Grand Rapids, MI), Aug. 16, 1898.

social circle of my friends and co-religionists.”⁷⁴ According to the sentence of excommunication, Kozłowski effectively excommunicated himself by organizing his Independent Catholic church, All Saints. In his suit, Kozłowski claimed that Feehan and Ledochowski used their power as bishops to intentionally injure the priest by ordering the sentence of excommunication to be read in all parishes on July 3, 1898, and threatening to penalize anyone who may associate with the “schismatic” priest.⁷⁵ Since that date, Kozłowski claimed, his parish collections dramatically decreased and he encountered difficulties making business transactions.⁷⁶

From 1898 until his death in 1907, Kozłowski’s life is hard to document. Certainly, Roman Catholic attacks on him and his Independent Catholic movement, especially his excommunications, helped to stymie the momentum he used to organize All Saints. As a result, most families returned to Saint Hedwig Roman Catholic Church within five years of the formation of All Saints in 1895; by 1905, Saint Hedwig’s membership, which bottomed at three hundred in 1895, reached fifteen hundred families.⁷⁷ In the ten years from his consecration until his death, Kozłowski founded twenty-three parishes, some as far away from Chicago as New Jersey and Manitoba, Canada.⁷⁸ In 1898, he claimed twenty-seven parishes.⁷⁹ In reality, the number is perhaps even a few more. Kozłowski maintained relations with the Old Catholic Church in Europe and even attended a conference in Bonn, Germany, in 1902, where he reported that progress was being made in the fight against the Jesuits in the United

⁷⁴ “Sues the Church,” *Daily Herald* (Biloxi, MS), Aug. 18, 1898.

⁷⁵ “Ex-Priest’s Unique Suit,” *Kansas City Journal* (Kansas City, MO), Oct. 16, 1898.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ “Parish History,” Saint Hedwig Catholic Church.

<<http://www.sthedwigbucktown.org/AboutUs/ParishHistory/tabid/95/Default.aspx>> Accessed 12/13/14.

⁷⁸ Parot, *Polish Catholics in Chicago*, 121.

⁷⁹ “Polish Bishop Defiant.”

States.⁸⁰ In February 1903, Kozłowski sought to unify his Independent Catholic movement with the American Episcopal Church, similar to Kołaszewski's efforts to do so in 1896. Up until his death, he continued trying to add Independent churches to his movement, including those of non-Poles like, for example, Lithuanians.⁸¹ By the early twentieth century, however, his opposition included not only the Roman Catholic Church, but also other Independent Catholic movements including, most prominently, Francis Hodur's Polish National Catholic Church.

Like Kołaszewski and Kamiński, Kozłowski too feared for his life during his leadership of his Independent Catholic movement.⁸² In August 1899, fearing that his enemies might assassinate him at any time, Kozłowski publicized his last will and testament. Leaving everything to All Saints, he told reporters:

I make my last will and testament now because I believe the enemies of the Independent Church movement may murder me at any time. They incite religious fanatics, who believe that killing me would be an act which would take them straight to heaven and make saints of them. Within the last month I have been attacked three times. Stones, clubs, and iron were hurled at me, and in the last instance a man attacked me with a club. I believe that my life is in danger, but I am not afraid. If I am done away with now there will be no legal squabble over my property after my death.⁸³

Kozłowski not only feared his enemies, but was also suspicious of those near him. For example, he had four of his parishioners arrested for conspiring to defame him by claiming he intentionally kept patients ill in his hospital, Saint Anthony Independent

⁸⁰ "Old Catholic Congress Praises Chicago Bishop," *New York Times*, Aug. 10, 1902.

⁸¹ "Lithuanian Church Row," *New York Times*, Jan. 25, 1904.

⁸² Kołaszewski claimed that his enemies were plotting to murder him ["Feud in a Church," *Duluth News-Tribune* (Duluth, MN), June 22, 1894]. Late one evening in February 1905, a man went to Kamiński's house and, pointing a gun at the priest, demanded money. Two shots were fired, but Kamiński went unharmed, the gun having been knocked from the man's hand by his house servant ["Attempted Assassination of Bishop Kaminski," *Columbus Daily Enquirer* (Columbus, GA), Feb. 12, 1905].

⁸³ "Expects to be Murdered," *New York Times*, August 22, 1899; "His Last Will," *Fort Worth Morning Register* (Fort Worth, TX), Aug. 22, 1899.

Catholic Hospital, in order to collect more money from them.⁸⁴ According to some accounts, he was accused of murder.⁸⁵ In August 1901, Kozłowski took four of his parishioners and a former priest to court for conspiring to defame him in order to get him arrested. According to testimony of a watchman, one defendant plotted to murder Kozłowski in order to take over the hospital and even tried to recruit him to do it for \$400 plus an ambulance-driving job.⁸⁶ According to one defendant, a former physician at the hospital, Kozłowski intentionally poisoned patients in order to keep their money.⁸⁷ In response, four of the defendants brought counter charges against Kozłowski, accusing him of poisoning seven patients who then died.⁸⁸ Kozłowski again accused the men, five total, of conspiring to murder him.⁸⁹

On January 14, 1907, Kozłowski died at his hospital. Police were asked to tend to his body by friends who suspected he was poisoned to death.⁹⁰ Physicians refused to issue a death certificate and instead referenced the case to the coroner.⁹¹ At the inquest into his death, an Episcopal priest testified that he heard Kozłowski's life was in danger.⁹² A friend testified that Kozłowski was drugged.⁹³ However, evidence was inconclusive and so no one was charged with murder. In addition to his mysterious death, Kozłowski's status with the Roman Catholic Church at the end of his life is

⁸⁴ *Minneapolis Journal* (Minneapolis, MN), Aug. 15, 1901.

⁸⁵ *Suburban Citizen* (Washington, DC), Aug. 17, 1901.

⁸⁶ "Plot to Kill a Bishop," *Omaha World Herald* (Omaha, NE), Aug. 31, 1901.

⁸⁷ "Chicago Bishop Accused," *New York Times*, Sep. 7, 1901.

⁸⁸ "Bishop Kozlowski Charges Conspiracy," *New York Times*, Nov. 5, 1901.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ "Founder of Omaha Church Believed to be Murdered," *Omaha World Herald* (Omaha, NE), Jan. 15, 1907.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² "Priest Stricken at Inquest," *New York Times*, Jan. 16, 1907.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

unknown. According to a *New York Times* article, Kozłowski attempted to reconcile with his former Church “in his last hours.”⁹⁴ Although reconciliation with Rome was common among schismatics, there is little evidence of Kozłowski pursuing this.

All Saints parishioners voted to invite Rev. Francis Hodur to Kozłowski’s funeral.⁹⁵ The parish, as well as several other parishes within Kozłowski’s network, joined the PNCC under the pastorship of Kozłowski’s successor’s successor in 1909. In 1926, All Saints became a PNCC cathedral with the creation of the Western Diocese; its first bishop, Leon Grochowski was elected the PNCC’s second Prime Bishop in 1947 and succeeded Hodur after his death in 1953. All Saints’ history recorded in the PNCC’s sixtieth anniversary book reads: “Among religious-minded people there can always be found a great number, who, with courage to match their conviction, are ever willing and able to struggle and to suffer for the sake of justice.”⁹⁶

5.2.4 SCRANTON, PENNSYLVANIA (1897-TODAY)

Franciszek (Francis) Hodur, unlike Kołazewski, Kamiński and Kozłowski, started his Independent Catholic movement fairly young, at age thirty-one, and oversaw its development for more than fifty-five years. Much thanks to his long and active life, his reform-movement-turned-schism – the Polish National Catholic Church – was the only Independent Catholic movement to last beyond its founder’s own lifetime. One consequence of its extant status – and therefore extant historical sources – is that the PNCC the best-known of the four Independent Catholic movements. Unfortunately, scholarly attention to the PNCC is scant and, when it is mentioned in histories of

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Album, 1897-1957.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Catholic America, its impact is deemed minimal based on its oft-repeated membership numbers: at most five hundred thousand – never more than five percent of the Polish immigrant population in the United States. However, when the PNCC is examined not as *the* result of conflict and schism in American Catholic history but *a* result, its formation and perseverance becomes part of a much larger story – one that, again, originates with the issue of authority over individual parishes within the Roman Catholic Church.

Hodur, born in 1866 in the Austrian-ruled partition of Poland, arrived in the United States in early 1893, having only partially completed his seminary studies. Seven months later, after finishing his studies at Saint Vincent Seminary (Latrobe, Pennsylvania), Hodur was ordained at Saint Peter Roman Catholic Cathedral in Scranton, Pennsylvania, by Bishop William O'Hara. As a new priest, he first worked as an assistant to Rev. Richard Aust at Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary Roman Catholic Church on Scranton's South Side. In early 1895, he was appointed the first pastor of a new Roman Catholic parish in Nanticoke, Pennsylvania, Holy Trinity.⁹⁷ In 1896, a pastor-centered conflict over control of parish finances broke out in Sacred Heart in Scranton, causing the congregation to split into two factions: pro-Aust and anti-Aust. The anti-Aust faction wanted Hodur, the parish's former assistant, to replace Aust as pastor. Bishop O'Hara, however, ignored the request and appointed another priest instead. Unsatisfied with this change, Hodur's supporters refused to obey the new pastor and asked Hodur to return to Scranton on his own, which he did. The new congregation raised nearly \$20,000 to purchase land and build a church, just one-tenth of a mile from Sacred Heart. Bishop O'Hara, however, would not accept the church into

⁹⁷ Nanticoke is twenty-seven miles southwest of Scranton.

the Roman Catholic Diocese of Scranton unless all property deeds would be legally transferred to him; Hodur and his parishioners refused to do so, and thus conflict continued.

In 1898, Hodur, like many other Catholics in similar property-related conflicts within the Roman Catholic Church, sought assistance from a higher Church authority. However, instead of just sending a petition to Rome, he delivered it himself. In a petition dated February 16, 1898, Hodur, representing three Catholic parishes in Pennsylvania, presented a solution to his constituents' grievances: a "National Church" (*Kościół Narodowy*). Pointing out problems caused by tyrannical, money-obsessed priests who frequently did not speak the language of their parishioners, Hodur urged Pope Leo XIII to "turn your eye towards these wretched people to keep their faith in the one holy and apostolic Church from being shaken."⁹⁸ "Protesting ourselves humbly at Your feet," the petition read, "we request the following:

1. That the Polish people in the United States have a bishop or representative to the Delegate of the Holy See in Washington who can use the Polish language.
2. That the material goods of the churches, that is, the schools, residences and church offices be entirely the property of the faithful.
3. That the people have some influence in the election of their pastors."⁹⁹

Hodur petitioned the pope not only for the three Catholic parishes he represented, but also for all "the Polish people in the United States."¹⁰⁰ Early on, before he turned from a

⁹⁸ Joseph W. Wiczerzak, *Bishop Francis Hodur: Biographical Essays* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1998), 88.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

strategy of reform to schism, Hodur conceptualized his movement as a national one. As with the movements of Kołaszewski, Kamiński and Kozłowski, the central issue of Hodur's movement was control.

After an April 1898 meeting of the Roman Catholic Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, Cardinal Mieczysław Ledóchowski (Prefect of the Congregation) started the procedure for Kozłowski's excommunication as well as directed that Hodur be informed that his requests would violate canon law and thus were denied. In September, acting with the Roman Catholic Diocese of Scranton bishop's authority, Coadjutor Bishop Michael Hoban excommunicated Hodur; the sentence was read in all Polish ethnic Roman Catholic parishes. Hodur also read his excommunication in Saint Stanislaus, but chose to ignore it, claiming it had no power without the pope's signature.¹⁰¹ Later, he compared his situation with other heretics and schismatics in Catholic history, claiming that he was similarly persecuted.¹⁰² Excommunication from the Roman Catholic Church forced Hodur on the path towards schism, but he postponed this ultimate solution until 1904.

Kołaszewski's, Kozłowski's and Kamiński's excommunications from the Roman Catholic Church all significantly hurt their movements. Hodur's excommunication, however, helped to spur his movement forward in many ways. Hodur was able to capitalize on the fervor caused by his sentence as news of it spread throughout the Scranton region. His speaking requests increased with his celebrity. Not only did he envision his movement within the Scranton immigrant Catholic population as having the potential to grow much larger, but he also took actions to expand it early when

¹⁰¹ "Rev. Francis Hodur Excommunicated," *Scranton Tribune* (Scranton, PA), Oct. 1, 1898.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

interest and emotions were high. Hodur, more than other Independent Catholic leaders, capitalized on unrest already present in Catholic America. Fortunately, the coal-mining region of northeastern Pennsylvania was ripe for an American Catholic reformation. For example, Polish Catholics in Dureya, Pennsylvania, held a demonstration to show their solidarity with Hodur.¹⁰³ Specifically targeting clerical enemies of Hodur's who were assisting at Forty Hour devotions at a Roman Catholic church the Sunday following Hodur's excommunication, the demonstrators sparked a riot.¹⁰⁴ In Plymouth, Pennsylvania, Polish Catholics met and adopted resolutions against Hodur's excommunication, similar to resolutions earlier adopted in Nanticoke.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, Hodur had early supporters in Wilkes-Barre and Dickson City (Priceburg).

Hodur's movement in Scranton inspired immigrant Catholics in the Scranton region to follow his and his supporters' lead. PNCC parishes sprang up in Dickson City (August 1897), Duryea (October 1898), Wilkes-Barre (March 1898), Plymouth (July 1898) and Nanticoke (1899).¹⁰⁶ Hodur thus established a geographically close network of parishes that could serve Catholics in a region that stretched thirty miles from Scranton. In addition to encouraging the organization of new churches, Hodur's movement expanded with the addition of many churches that were already established as Independent. For example, Independent Catholic churches in Passaic, New Jersey; Freeland, Pennsylvania; Chicago; Buffalo, New York; Chicopee and Lowell, Massachusetts; and Baltimore, Maryland, all joined Hodur's movement within its first

¹⁰³ "Rioting at Duryea," *Scranton Tribune* (Scranton, PA), Oct. 5, 1898.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ "Independent Church to be Organized," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Oct. 27, 1898.

¹⁰⁶ The Nanticoke parish failed to last long. It regrouped again in 1905, but then again failed, before successfully regrouping in 1924. The Wilkes-Barre parish also quickly failed, but it regrouped successfully in 1900. Both parishes, like many Independent Catholic churches, faced great Roman Catholic opposition.

ten years. In 1922, the PNCC's twenty-fifth anniversary book listed a total of forty-six parishes.¹⁰⁷ By 1930, the number grew to one hundred nine.¹⁰⁸ In 1957, the PNCC claimed at least one hundred fifty-three parishes, not including more than one hundred established in Poland since its 1918 independence.¹⁰⁹ Short-lived parishes have gone unnoted, even in such internal sources. For example, the Independent Catholic church in Palmerton, Pennsylvania (est. 1917), which closed just after joining the PNCC in 1919, is not included in the 1922 book. Since Catholic churches, Independent and Roman, typically did not print histories via anniversary booklets until at least their tenth year, it is difficult to count those churches that quickly dissolved.

According to a December 1901 *Wilkes-Barre Times* article, Hodur's excommunication did not seem to have caused its desired effect. The article explained the significance of the penalty, which Bishop Hoban had initially withheld "in a spirit of extreme toleration": "Its issuance means that in the eyes of the church these [Independent Catholic] priests are deprived of all their clerical functions and those who permit one of them to minister to them as a priest commits a sacrilege."¹¹⁰ Although Hodur claimed to be affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, the article points out, he refused to recognize the authority of the bishop. The *Wilkes-Barre Times* printed Hodur's response to both the article and its printing of a notice of his excommunication. In it, Hodur described how not only he and his supporters in Scranton, but also Poles from around the region, broke away from the Roman Catholic Church (and joined his movement), because "they did not wish to agree with the laws of the council of

¹⁰⁷ *Po Drodze Życia W 25-ta Rocznicę Powstania Polskiego Narodowego Katolickiego Kościoła w Ameryce, 1897-1922* (Scranton, PA: Polish National Catholic Church, 1922).

¹⁰⁸ *Księga Pamiątkowa* "33."

¹⁰⁹ *Album, 1897-1957*.

¹¹⁰ "Ban of Excommunication," *Wilkes-Barre Times* (Wilkes-Barre, PA), Dec. 18, 1901.

Baltimore (1893) according to which churches, parishes, schools, etc. are not the property of the people who build them but of the bishops.”¹¹¹ Also, Hodur explained: “Our church does not agree with the decrees of the last council of Vatican (Rome), throws out the Latin and introduces the Polish language at the mass and all church ceremonies.”¹¹² In addition to naming five towns in Pennsylvania (Dickson City, Duryea, Plymouth, Scranton and Wilkes-Barre) Hodur named towns in New Jersey and Massachusetts as supporters who, ten thousand strong, elected him to lead their movement in 1898.¹¹³

Not yet decisively split from the Roman Catholic Church, the PNCC held its first synod in 1904. On September 6, the delegates – fifteen priests and forty-seven laymen – adopted a constitution drafted by Hodur, which declared the synod the highest power in the Church, with the power to elect a bishop.¹¹⁴ According to the *Wilkes-Barre Times*, the synod adopted resolutions “declaring the Roman Catholic doctrine of papal infallibility to be blasphemous and expressing sympathy with all Christian denominations which favor liberty of conscience.”¹¹⁵ In addition, “The resolutions also call upon all Polish Catholics to separate themselves from the church of Rome and establish independent churches.”¹¹⁶ Thus the Scranton-based Independent Catholic movement abandoned all hope of reform within the Roman Catholic Church and finally accepted schism. Hodur was elected bishop on September 7 and appointed a cabinet

¹¹¹ “Father Hodur Replies,” *Wilkes-Barre Times* (Wilkes-Barre, PA), Dec. 20, 1901.

¹¹² *Ibid.* Hodur introduced the Polish-language Mass in Scranton on Christmas Day, 1901.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* These towns included Bayonne and Jersey City, NJ; and Fall River, Lowell and Chicopee, MA.

¹¹⁴ “Polish Independents,” *Wilkes-Barre Times* (Wilkes-Barre, PA), Sep. 1, 1904; “New Church is Organized,” *Wilkes-Barre Times* (Wilkes-Barre, PA), Sep. 7, 1904.

¹¹⁵ “New Church is Organized.”

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

staffed with priests and laymen from northeastern Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and northern New Jersey.¹¹⁷ Under Hodur's leadership, the PNCC continued its outreach, marking net gains in membership each year, especially in the 1920s.

In 1905, Pope Pius X sent a Polish archbishop, Francesco Albino Symon, to investigate the cause of schisms in the United States, especially in northeastern Pennsylvania. On May 13, the *Wilkes-Barre Times* reported that Hodur would accept reconciliation with the Roman Catholic Church under three conditions: 1.) "The appointment of Polish bishops for Polish Catholics of the United States, such bishops to be established in bishoprics, entirely separate and distinct from all other bishoprics;" 2.) "The vesting of all church property in the congregations of the several churches, rather than in bishops;" and 3.) "The selection of pastors by the several congregations, or, at least, the giving of such congregations the right to reject the pastors appointed by the bishops."¹¹⁸ By 1905, however, Hodur and Independent Catholics across the United States knew that Rome would not bend on the issue of lay control within the parish: schism was the only solution. On September 29, 1907, Hodur was consecrated a bishop at Saint Gertrude's Cathedral in Utrecht, Netherlands, by Bishop Gerardus Gul. In Europe, he attended the Congress of Bishops of the Christian Catholic Church of Switzerland, the Old Catholic Church of Germany and the National Catholic Church of the Netherlands, which all agreed to "act in harmony" with the PNCC.¹¹⁹ Hodur returned to Scranton on October 12, his break with Rome more decisive than ever – there was no going back.

¹¹⁷ "National Church Cabinet," *Wilkes-Barre Times* (Wilkes-Barre, PA), Sep. 12, 1904.

¹¹⁸ "Poles Want a Bishop," *Wilkes-Barre Times* (Wilkes-Barre, PA), May 13, 1905.

¹¹⁹ "Bishop Hodur Consecrated," *Wilkes-Barre Times* (Wilkes-Barre, PA), Oct. 14, 1907.

5.3 SHORT-LIVED SCHISM

Many Roman Catholic schisms in the United States, if not most, were short-lived.

Clergy-led and bishop-backed Roman Catholic opposition could be fierce and exhausting to fledgling schismatic movements, especially those fueled by intense emotions forged in the midst of fiery conflicts. Interest – emotional as well as spiritual – often proved difficult for leaders to maintain. Likewise, financial support slackened as followers lost interest, most being pulled back into their former Roman Catholic sphere. Sometimes, debt forced Independent Catholic churches to seek reconciliation with the Roman Catholic Church; members simply could not maintain their financial independence. This is what happened to a two-and-a-half-year-old Independent Catholic Slovak ethnic church in Palmerton, Pennsylvania, in 1919.¹²⁰ The story of its almost instant creation, rapid decline and, more or less, surrender to the archbishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Philadelphia, exemplifies the experience of many schismatic Catholics long lost to history.

The multi-ethnic Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church (est. 1908) in Palmerton functioned as a mission to Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in nearby Slatington until 1913 with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia's archbishop Patrick John Ryan's appointment of a permanent pastor.¹²¹ Rev. Emery Kucharic took over pastorship the following year, in 1914, and quickly gained popularity, especially among the parish's Slovak members. His transfer and replacement with Rev. John P. Vlossak sparked conflict within the parish in 1917. This conflict caught the attention of leaders

¹²⁰ Palmerton is thirty-eight miles east from Shenandoah, PA.

¹²¹ The history on Sacred Heart's website notes that "the parish consisted of fourteen different nationalities" in 1913. None are listed. Also, the schism-inducing conflict is not mentioned. <<http://www.shcpalmerton.org/history.htm>> Accessed 11/19/14.

within the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia, because it did not die down on its own, but instead provoked schism. The schism, which aligned with the PNCC in 1919, was short-lived – a victim of deliberate and strategic attacks backed by Roman Catholic authorities. Conflict died down by the close of 1919, the schism vanished, and life at Sacred Heart continued as if nothing happened.

In October 1917, “the committee representing the parish of Palmerton” wrote to Archbishop Edmund Francis Prendergast, who succeeded Ryan in 1911, to inform him of their plans to “erect a Slovak Catholic Church” under PNCC founder Rev. Francis Hodur’s “supervision and jurisdiction.”¹²² Noting the bishop’s “flat refusal” and his and other bishops’ denials of “every plea of the people” to permit the organization of a new Roman Catholic Slovak ethnic parish, the letter-writers expressed their firm resolve to break away.¹²³ Independentism emerged as the solution to their battle for control within their parish. The Palmerton Independent Catholic church became part of the PNCC’s growing national network of parishes in 1919. By the end of the year, however, the parish dissolved under financial strains amplified by dwindling membership. It was not even included among the forty-six parishes listed and described in the PNCC’s twenty-fifth anniversary book published in 1922: it was a “failed” attempt at Independentism.¹²⁴

Palmerton’s immigrant Catholic community’s move towards Independentism began in a typical way: with the unwanted transfer of a beloved pastor. In March 1917, Archbishop Prendergast replaced Rev. Emery Kucharic with Rev. John Vlossak, thus

¹²² Letter to Archbishop Prendergast from people of Palmerton parish, Oct. 10, 1917, Prendergast Collection, 71.124Ach, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Po Drodze Życia.*

sparking conflict within the parish. According to a local newspaper report, seven hundred fifty people escorted Kucharic to the train station on the day of his departure. Coincidentally, Vlossak arrived on the very same train and so to the very same crowd who “greeted him in any but a friendly spirit.”¹²⁵ Vlossak exited the train to be, in one witness’s words, “mobbed by an unruly crowd of people, without any apparent cause.”¹²⁶ According to a report prepared for Prendergast’s office of the riotous events surrounding Vlossak’s arrival in Palmerton, people cheered “Let us kill him, pull him out of the cab” as he made his escape.¹²⁷ The crowd called the priest a “scoundrel traitor thief” who, they were convinced, pushed Kucharic out of Sacred Heart for his own benefit.¹²⁸ “We will not let him in our town and will not allow him in our church,” they shouted, “He is not one of us.”¹²⁹ Apparently, Kucharic had fed his parishioners unattractive details about Vlossak, which primed them to act violently against the otherwise unknown newcomer. Vlossak, Kucharic warned, was “not a Slovak” and would seek to take their church away from them.¹³⁰

According to a Slovak-speaking passenger on Kucharic’s train, the priest and his companions – three men and three women – “wore pleased expressions, and seemed to be glad to see such disgusting treatment given to Fr. Vlossak.”¹³¹ The company “seemed gleeful” and “laughed heartily” about the recent events at the train station.¹³² Kucharic said: “If you don’t like him [Vlossak] lock the church;” to which his companions echoed:

¹²⁵ Letter to Cardinal Dougherty from Rev. John P. Vlossak, March 30, 1917, Dougherty Collection, 80.8374, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

¹²⁶ Letter to Cardinal Dougherty from Rev. John P. Vlossak, April 14, 1917, Dougherty Collection, 80.8374, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

¹²⁷ Letter to Cardinal Dougherty from Rev. John P. Vlossak, March 30, 1917.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Letter to Cardinal Dougherty from Rev. John P. Vlossak, April 14, 1917.

¹³² *Ibid.*

“Lock the church.”¹³³ In concluding his report, the witness highlighted how it seemed to him “that some concealed action was being covered” and that Kucharic and his companions “were in league to some hidden end.”¹³⁴ The author of the report, which was sent to Archbishop Prendergast’s office, claimed to have “no personal motive” in making his “true and correct statement of fact.”¹³⁵ Regardless of his true intentions, the witness’s testimony supports Vlossak’s impression that Kucharic set him up for failure by turning his congregation against him before his arrival. The heated conflict within Sacred Heart that Vlossak entered into – a significant portion of his congregation was strongly set against him before even meeting him – was not entirely unusual. Sometimes, it did not take much for lay Catholics to turn against a priest, especially if underlying conflict-inducing elements were already present within a parish.

In order to prevent any violence against Vlossak, police hurried him off in a coach to his brother-in-law’s house. Later, upon arriving at the parish rectory, he was met by a large crowd which, according to a newspaper report, “requested him in unmistakable language to leave the premises.”¹³⁶ According to another report of the incident, “the bloodthirsty mob surrounded the house,” “blocked both exits” and “justled” Vlossak out of the rectory where they “laid violent hands on his person.”¹³⁷ The crowd laughed, jeered and shouted at him. Women blasphemed him and children spit at him.¹³⁸ Not sure what to do and quite possibly fearing for his life, Vlossak retreated first to his former parish, then to Hazleton. Twelve men “patroled [sic] the [Palmerton]

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Letter to Cardinal Dougherty from Rev. John P. Vlossak, March 30, 1917.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

depot to prevent his return by physical force.”¹³⁹ Later, Vlossak described how police interference saved him, “on the brink of martyrdom,” “from murderous hands of [a] mob” who “spit upon and hit” him on the day of his arrival.¹⁴⁰ According to Vlossak, Archbishop Dennis Joseph Cardinal Dougherty (who succeeded Prendergast in 1918) ordered the priest “to uphold [the] rights of [the] Church even if they shoot you at the Altar, the archdiocese will always back you and reward you.”¹⁴¹ Consequently, Vlossak was forced to face the conflict in Palmerton head on and fight his opposition.

According to a letter sent to Philadelphia Bishop Joseph McCord, Vlossak attacked his enemies from the pulpit. He “denounced what he termed the opposing faction” (Kucharic’s supporters), calling them “Socialists, Deviators from the Catholic faith, dunces, etc.”¹⁴² Even though Mass attendance consequently dropped at Sacred Heart, Vlossak continued his attack by, for example, ordering his enemies to be removed from the parish and refusing to baptize their children. Expressing concern of “being denied [sic] the sacred rights of the church” – and careful to express their good intentions to not “oppose the doctrines of the church” via their actions – parishioners petitioned Archbishop Prendergast for a new parish.¹⁴³ They noted in the petition that they were willing to hand over their recently acquired property (\$2,000 worth of real estate) to the bishop in return for his permission to organize a new parish for which they already collected over \$2,000. In closing, they informed the archbishop, “it is impossible to unite the Slovak people in this congregation with the Magyar people, on

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Letter to Cardinal Dougherty from Rev. John P. Vlossak, 1923, Dougherty Collection, 80.8374, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² Letter to Bishop Joseph McCord of Philadelphia from “The Committee” (Palmerton), n.d., Dougherty Collection, 71.123Ach, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

account of friction existing between them dating back to European times.”¹⁴⁴ Thus, the petitioners attempted to appeal to Prendergast by putting their dilemma into ethnic terms.

A typed report of the Palmerton “schism” prepared for the office of the archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia provides a unique insight into the perspective of Roman Catholic authorities on conflict within the Church. Since it is an unusual type of source – perhaps not unusual in its creation, but in its preservation and accessibility to scholars – it is worth a close examination. According to the report, two factors sparked the schism-inducing conflict in Palmerton: 1.) The transfer of priests – the beloved and popular Kucharic for the unknown Vlossak; and 2.) A struggle for control within the parish, described in the report as “a deliberate and previously agitated attempt to wrest church authority from the Bishop and parish administration from his Priest and thus to exploit religion.”¹⁴⁵ The report’s description of the two causes as, respectively, “proximate” and “remote” reflects the reality of conflicts across Catholic America: a remote (or underlying) cause permits conflict to precipitate to such a level that action can be suddenly provoked by a proximate (or immediate) cause.¹⁴⁶ In the case of Sacred Heart in Palmerton, parishioners’ underlying desire for control within their parish created a situation in which the transfer of Kucharic could provoke such riotous actions as those taken against his replacement.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Letter to Cardinal Dougherty from Rev. John P. Vlossak, March 30, 1917. “and thus to exploit religion” was added in print to the typed report.

¹⁴⁶ Letter to Cardinal Dougherty from Rev. John P. Vlossak, Dec. 23, 1919, Dougherty Collection, 80.8374, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

Most often, across Catholic America, the underlying cause for conflict was the issue of control – the laity’s desire to secure control of the administration of parish finances, property and employees (especially priests).

The Palmerton “schism” report describes how members of the new Independent Catholic church “mis-informed misled and even threatened” people to join.¹⁴⁷ Although they started out strong in numbers, many “left after sobering up from the deception and consequent disorder.”¹⁴⁸ Much of this “deception,” according to the report, came from its questionable leadership: men who were determined to not be “religious minded.”¹⁴⁹ For example, one leader, Sacred Heart’s organist, lacked “religion and morality.”¹⁵⁰ Another leader – an “Instigator of unrest” and an “avowed enemy” of the parish priest – was not even Roman Catholic, but “Greek Catholic.”¹⁵¹ He brought with him to the Palmerton conflict experience from his earlier involvement in the “Hodur schism in Scranton” and even had “the apostate Hodur” baptize his son.¹⁵² According to the report, he was “compelled by the faithful Slovaks to leave Scranton for good” and was followed to Palmerton by warnings from Scranton Roman Catholic priests who urged people “to beware of the viper and schism propagator and hypocritical exploiter [sic] of religion.”¹⁵³ The report claimed he used his involvement in schismatic movements to his own personal benefit,

¹⁴⁷ Letter to Cardinal Dougherty from Rev. John P. Vlossak, March 30, 1917.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* The original typed number is crossed out and “130” is written in print.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

using collected funds to, for example, pay for his house. According to another report, this leader “took advantage” of the uproar caused by Kucharic’s removal from Sacred Heart in order “to inflame the Slavish people against” Vlossak.¹⁵⁴

The report also accused several other leaders of duping supporters into mortgaging their houses in order to help financially support the new church. A handwritten note at the end of the report noted that forty families, about seventy-five people, were “not looking for religion but for money.”¹⁵⁵ Others leaders were described as, for example, a “nominal catholic,” “not a practical catholic,” a “non catholic” or described as belonging to other faiths, to which they were also nominal members (e.g., a “nominal Lutheran avowed enemy of all religion”).¹⁵⁶ Many were described as “socialists.” Several, too, were noted to be “violent and insolent” agitators against Roman Catholic Church “Authority.”¹⁵⁷ One leader used his power as a “bar tender” to “poisen [sic] the minds of the rioters and incited them through drink against order and authority.”¹⁵⁸ Another was noted as “illiterate.”¹⁵⁹ Thus the report targeted specific individuals as the primary agitators of unrest within the immigrant Catholic community of Palmerton. Regular lay people, according to the report, were simply tricked into joining the “schism” by clever swindlers of dubious repute. The report described the new church’s officers and trustees as “dupes and pawns in the hands of ringleaders.”¹⁶⁰ Likewise, another report was also sympathetic to the Catholics initially attracted to the schism. According to the report, schism leaders promised people that

¹⁵⁴ Letter to Cardinal Dougherty from Rev. John P. Vlossak, Dec. 23, 1919.

¹⁵⁵ Letter to Cardinal Dougherty from Rev. John P. Vlossak, March 30, 1917.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

the archbishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia would recognize their church after they built a sanctuary. Thus, they were able to deceive people into giving financial support.¹⁶¹ The report called such “poor people” “good Catholics at heart” who, after realizing “that national Catholic ministers were not their priests,” “awoke to the deception” and “began slowly to return to the fold.”¹⁶²

Members of the Independent Catholic church picketed Sacred Heart in order to keep people from entering to attend services. Those who tried to enter were ridiculed and denounced in “anti-catholic papers,” such as the *New Yorkský Denník* (*The New York Daily*), a Slovak-language paper published in New York in which the schismatics advertised for a Roman Catholic priest.¹⁶³ They kept up their anti-Roman Catholic attack for three years, which the report noted “the good Catholics” of Palmerton had to suffer through “with the faith and courage of the first Christians.”¹⁶⁴ According to the report, the schismatics attacked Roman Catholics (referred to as “the faithful”) by, for example, “Publically insulting” and “Ridiculing” them for continuing to support the Roman Catholic parish of Sacred Heart.¹⁶⁵ They called them “fools”, “traitors,” “renegades” and “Romans.”¹⁶⁶ They “threw out” Sacred Heart supporters from fraternal and Catholic lodges, thus depriving them of their benefits unless they gave money to support the new church.¹⁶⁷ They also threatened to evict renters from their properties unless they joined the schism. In an extreme example, one deceased “faithful” Roman Catholic’s “fallen away relatives” took revenge on him by, according to the report,

¹⁶¹ Letter to Cardinal Dougherty from Rev. John P. Vlossak, Dec. 23, 1919.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Letter to Cardinal Dougherty from Rev. John P. Vlossak, March 30, 1917.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

submitting his body to “heretical burial” and then taking all his money.¹⁶⁸ The schismatics also framed people in order to get them arrested.¹⁶⁹ The “ungodly apostates” did so “out of pure diabolical hatred and revenge because the faithful would not apostatize with them.”¹⁷⁰ The courts would not even help the “faithful” Roman Catholics: “When seeking civil justice their case was thrown [sic] out as a religious squabble.”¹⁷¹

According to the report, the schismatic movement’s leaders in Palmerton were “Haughty, overbearing filled with pride and antagonism.”¹⁷² Their belief that they could “compel the Church to submit to them” was delusional, but necessary, because they needed “the financial backing of the Bishop and his Diocese.”¹⁷³ Insisting they be given their demands out of their rights as “good Catholics,” they refused to submit to Roman Catholic authorities. The movement’s supporters “constantly reviled [sic] and blasphemed the [Roman Catholic] Church, The Pope and Bishop and Priests.”¹⁷⁴ They called the pope, for example, “an imposter satan and the black cause of Slovak slavery who is plotting with the tyrants of Europe to keep the Slavs in blindness and bondage.”¹⁷⁵ They built their church themselves, without Rome’s help, in order “to show what they can be without Rome and they will never allow the Italian-Irish-German trust company of a Roman Bishop to control their national church and religion.”¹⁷⁶ “Their creed,” reads the report, “is nationality before religion and get all you can out of

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

it.”¹⁷⁷ In conclusion, the report described the Palmerton schism as “A death blow to the cause of Catholicity in this town” and an “injustice” to the Roman Catholic parish of Sacred Heart. It predicted the possible “complete loss of Faith in many [Palmerton Catholics] and religious indifference in the rest.”¹⁷⁸ The report did, however, offer some hope: “Most [Palmerton Catholics] have publicly expressed themselves to the contrary.”¹⁷⁹

In December 1919, the Palmerton Independent Catholic church collapsed. The “schism” report prepared for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia explained how the church’s more than \$42,000 of debt became insurmountable, to the point that “even the archapostate Hodur cannot help them.”¹⁸⁰ Out of the four hundred original members of the Independent Catholic church only one hundred remained by December 1919.¹⁸¹ Unable to any longer cover the interest on the debts they incurred in building their church or to support a pastor, they turned to the Roman Catholic archbishop of Philadelphia for help. According to a report, the schismatics approached the archbishop “not for any love for the Roman Catholic Church,” but “to relieve themselves of the financial embarrassment.”¹⁸² “The acceptance of this property,” read the report, “would be a sad reflection on the faithful – Slavish, Hungarian, Polish, and American Catholics. Many would give up their faith rather than go to services in a church built by people who have insulted them and their pastor.”¹⁸³ Also, the debt would be too large to undertake. Sacred Heart already had a lot of property – a church (with a school in the

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Letter to Cardinal Dougherty from Rev. John P. Vlossak, Dec. 23, 1919.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

basement), a rectory, a convent and a plot of land intended for future building – which, according to a report, was in a better location and worth more than that of the Independent Catholic church's.¹⁸⁴ In conclusion, the report asked Archbishop Dougherty to “consider the just rights of the faithful Catholics of Palmerton, and that you not sacrifice the true interests of religion in the parish [Sacred Heart] to the commercial and deceptive aspirations of a small group of apostates.”¹⁸⁵ Ultimately, the archbishop did not accept the property.

Short-lived schisms like the one in Palmerton inspired Roman Catholic leadership to take action to resolve later conflicts in Roman Catholic parishes, especially those geographically close to earlier attempts at Independentism. When this failed – for example, schism did occur in nearby Shenandoah and did, unlike in Palmerton, stick – Roman Catholic clergy deliberately acted to weaken new Independent Catholic churches. Roman Catholic archival sources, unlike published Church histories, show a strong concern for schism amongst the Church's pastoral leadership. For example, in 1933, Archbishop Dougherty wrote multiple letters to Bucks County Roman Catholic priests in order to enlist them in efforts to curb the growth of Independentism in the Philadelphia region. In a stock letter sent to several priests, he wrote: “No doubt you are aware that some so-called priests of the Polish Independent or Schismatic Church are making efforts to pervert the Poles, Lithuanians, Slovaks, etc., in your neighborhood, and for a radius of from ten to twenty-

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

five miles about you.”¹⁸⁶ According to the letter, “schismatic” priests (e.g., Polish National Catholic priests) were holding meetings and canvassing door-to-door in order to stir up interest in establishing Independent Catholic parishes, most specifically in Quakertown. Not coincidentally, the PNCC had found recent success in establishing parishes in southeastern Pennsylvania, including in: Bethlehem, Allentown and Reading in 1927; McAdoo in 1929; and Summit Hill in 1930. Although it did establish several parishes in Philadelphia and nearby parts of New Jersey (e.g., Camden in 1912, and Trenton in 1916), the PNCC was unsuccessful in the Bucks County region that lay between Allentown and Pennsylvania’s largest city.

According to Archbishop Dougherty’s letter, Roman Catholic priests actively sought to discourage schism in the Philadelphia region and, giving the lack of permanent Independent Catholic parishes, found success in their methods for doing so. One such method was to reach out to the, in Dougherty’s words, “foreign population” – which, since immigration was restricted from eastern and southeastern Europe in 1924, had at least been in the United States for almost a decade by 1933 – in their own languages.¹⁸⁷ In one letter, Dougherty asked the priest of the large multi-ethnic territorial parish to “cooperate” with a certain Slavic priest in his efforts to curb schism. This priest, the archbishop noted, would be willing to “make a census” of the parish’s first- and second-generation immigrants as well as to minister to them in their own languages.¹⁸⁸ One priest replied to Dougherty’s stock letter to express his certainty that no one in his parish would be “persuaded” by schismatic advocates, “because they seem

¹⁸⁶ Letter to Rev. Joseph Schneider, M.S.C., from Cardinal Dougherty, Oct. 5, 1913, Dougherty Collection, 80.8060, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA ID 526; Letter to Rev. Leo J. Letterhouse from Cardinal Dougherty, Oct. 5, 1933, Dougherty Collection, 80.6749, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

to be proud of belonging to a mixed parish.”¹⁸⁹ However, he wrote, the Slavic priest was welcome to visit as, the priest thought, he could “do a great deal of good” amongst “the foreign-speaking people outside of Quakertown.”¹⁹⁰ In the end, the Independent Catholic church in Quakertown, like in Palmerton and countless other places, did not last long. Its story, therefore, remains a mystery.

5.4 LONG-LIVED SCHISM

The Polish National Catholic parish of Holy Ghost (est. 1923) was not only some community members’ solution to a specific conflict, but also a solution to intra-Catholic conflict that had afflicted the Catholic community of Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, for decades. The schism, surprisingly, did not rupture the long-embattled Lithuanian Catholic community, but instead the relatively untroubled Polish Catholic community. This was the community that remained at Saint Casimir Roman Catholic Church – the originally mixed Polish-Lithuanian ethnic parish established in 1872 – when its Lithuanian members left to form Saint George in 1891. Consequently, Saint Casimir became a predominantly ethnic Polish parish. Thus, ethnicity was not a factor in members’ decision to break away from the Roman Catholic Church. Instead, it was the issue of control: Saint Casimir parishioners who established Holy Ghost rejected the archbishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Philadelphia’s attempts to control their religious lives. As elsewhere, schism was a last resort, reached only after failed

¹⁸⁹ Letter to Rev. Leo J. Letterhouse from Cardinal Dougherty, Oct. 5, 1933.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

attempts at militant, diplomatic and legal strategies. Significantly, unlike other regional attempts at Independentism in eastern Pennsylvania (e.g., Palmerton), the Shenandoah schism stuck; the PNCC parish is still active today.

In the 1890s, the discovery of rich coal deposits in the Shenandoah region brought a thousands of immigrants from eastern and southeastern Europe in search of work. In order to accommodate the mostly Catholic newcomers, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia established the parish of Saint Stanislaus Bishop and Martyr in 1897. The new parish was built less than one-third of a mile from the twenty-five-year-old, and also ethnically Polish, Saint Casimir. In its first year, Saint Stanislaus attracted four hundred forty-six “paying members.”¹⁹¹ Initially meeting at Saint George (Lithuanian), Saint Stanislaus’s first pastor served less than four months. For three months, various visiting Lithuanian priests ministered to the congregation until a Polish-speaking Lithuanian priest was appointed pastor. Six months later – during which parish membership increased to five hundred seventy-three families – this pastor was replaced with Rev. Stanisław Olesiński. During his short tenure, the parish purchased an Evangelical church, started a parish school and acquired land in order to build a rectory and a convent. The following year, Olesiński was replaced with a priest who stayed for five months; his replacement stayed for less than two years. In 1903, parishioners successfully petitioned Archbishop Ryan to reappoint Olesiński. However, he left again after two years; his replacement also stayed just two years.

¹⁹¹ *Historia Polskich Rzymsko-Katolickich Parafij: Archidiecezji Filadelfijskiej w Stanach Zjednoczonych Północnej Ameryki* (Philadelphia, PA: Filadelfijskiej Grupy VIII Zjednoczenia Kapłanów Polskich w Ameryce, 1940), 57.

Finally, in 1907, the parish was appointed a priest who stayed more than a few months or a couple years. After six years, he was replaced by a priest who stayed for seven years: Rev. Rev. Ludwik Stachowicz.¹⁹²

Saint Stanislaus had no fixed boundaries, which apparently caused some confusion within the Catholic community of Shenandoah. Stachowicz brought this situation to the attention of diocesan authorities, suggesting that boundaries be clearly established for the town's two ethnically Polish Roman Catholic parishes. The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia thus established new parish boundaries, consequently reassigning many members of the neighboring parish of Saint Casimir to Saint Stanislaus. Outraged at the new regulation, many Shenandoah Catholics refused to adhere to their reassignment. In addition, they brought the matter to court, but lost: both county and state courts confirmed the regulation imposed by clerical authorities. In the meantime, Stachowicz's transfer away from Saint Stanislaus permitted Shenandoah's Catholics to continue to ignore their unwanted reassignments. The seed for conflict within the community, however, had been planted. Another attempt by Roman Catholic authorities to control the Catholic laity of Shenandoah – in this case, to control their choice of parishes – would soon put many on a path toward Independentism.¹⁹³

Stachowicz was replaced with a pastor who stayed at Saint Stanislaus for four years: Rev. Alfred Wróblewski. According to a parish history published in a Roman Catholic anniversary book, Wróblewski left Shenandoah in 1924 following a disagreement with a parish committee over a building project for which the committee

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 58-60.

secured a \$30,000 loan. The history recounts how his replacement settled the dispute by dissolving the committee and overseeing the completion of the project himself. With pride, the history's anonymous author notes how the \$42,500 expansion and improvements were completed via collections, thus avoiding any loans. In addition, the parish successfully eliminated the debt acquired by the defunct building committee. In 1932, Saint Stanislaus underwent another change of pastors; after two years he was replaced. The history concludes with the parish's membership – three hundred fifty families – and an estimation of its total wealth – \$200,000.¹⁹⁴ The fact that the boundary-centered conflict that erupted parish in 1922 led to the formation of Holy Ghost Polish National Catholic Church is not mentioned. Interestingly, the history does not account for why Saint Stanislaus had two hundred twenty-three fewer families in 1940 than at the turn of the century. Likewise, the story of Saint Casimir in the same Roman Catholic history ignores the schism that shook the entire Polish Catholic community of Shenandoah.

According to Holy Ghost's entry in the PNCC's thirty-third anniversary book, troubles started in Shenandoah's Polish Catholic community with the tenure of a Rev. Dąbrowski at Saint Casimir. Dąbrowski implemented "the Philadelphia bishop's tax" on Shenandoah's two Polish parishes – \$15,000 on Saint Stanislaus and \$30,000 on Saint Casimir.¹⁹⁵ In response, parishioners at both parishes attempted to delegate with the archbishop via their parish committees.¹⁹⁶ Their efforts, however, "came to nothing": "Dąbrowski declared that the bishop would not back down and the sum must be

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁹⁵ *Księga Pamiątkowa* "33," 270.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

paid.”¹⁹⁷ Refusing to accept Dąbrowski’s ultimatum, the parishes formed a delegation of trustees and sued the bishop. Failing in their legal efforts, “The parish trustees understood that every effort would be useless and the parish belonged to the bishop and was his personal property.”¹⁹⁸ After this realization, parish trustees contacted Francis Hodur, bishop of the PNCC, about the possibility of establishing a Polish National Catholic parish. Delegates sent by Hodur arrived in Shenandoah in May 1922 and helped to organize Holy Ghost. In response, Archbishop Dougherty filed a lawsuit against the new church, but lost. Holy Ghost remained, with two hundred families. The fight for Independence, however, was not yet over. Through their efforts, the pastors of Saint Stanislaus and Saint Casimir (Wróblewski and John Mickun) were able to divide the parish. According to the PNCC history: “100 families remained [at Holy Ghost], whereas the rest – weak ones – returned to the yoke of the Irish.”¹⁹⁹

Nearly fifteen years later, a diocesan-level conflict erupted which threatened to rupture Shenandoah’s Polish Catholic community again. The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia decided to once again enforce the parish boundaries put in place twenty years earlier, which had heretofore been ignored. In April 1937, members of both Saint Casimir and Saint Stanislaus petitioned Archbishop Dougherty to “rescind” the new boundary restrictions and to “allow and permit conditions to exist as they have been for the past sixty-five (65) years.”²⁰⁰ Saint Casimir parishioners who – the petitioners explained, had been baptized, received First Communion, were confirmed and married in the parish – were now being forced to attend the smaller

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 272.

²⁰⁰ Letter to Cardinal Dougherty from John A. Miernicki, Esquire, 1937, Dougherty Collection, 80.7289, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

Saint Stanislaus. According to them, the reassignment of many parishioners was “very unjust.”²⁰¹ In addition, Saint Stanislaus was not large enough to accommodate the “at least 2000 parishioners” it was expected to receive, and building a new church “would be an unnecessary hardship.”²⁰² The petitioners reminded Dougherty of the conflict sparked by parish boundaries in the 1920s, which caused three hundred families to join “a non-Catholic Polish Church” [Holy Ghost PNCC].²⁰³ Many Shenandoah Polish Catholics attributed the renewed conflict over boundary lines to a power struggle between the pastors of the two Polish parishes. According to them, Rev. John Mickun (Saint Casimir) and Rev. Stephen Zmich (Saint Stanislaus) refused to minister to anyone not geographically assigned to their parishes. Supposedly, they even refused to administer Last Rites requested by Catholics not residing within their jurisdictions. In conclusion, the petitioners asked the archbishop “to consider the possible misunderstanding, commotion, turmoil and discord that may be caused among the Polish race in Shenandoah if they should decide that no one will compel them to attend a certain church.”²⁰⁴ In other words, they threatened to disobey.

The petition did not spur Archbishop Dougherty to take immediate action. A couple of months later, the committee formed to represent the two parishes wrote again to the archbishop: “The parishioners affected are clamoring boisterously and vigorously protesting. They ask for a discontinuance of this local division.”²⁰⁵ As in the earlier petition, the committee pointed out contributing causes for their pastors’ interest in

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

enforcing the boundary lines: “clerical jealousy” and “monetary greed.”²⁰⁶ They again mentioned the threat of rebellion, claiming that the acceptance of their proposed solution would allow them to “quell the more radical ones who are affected.”²⁰⁷ In July, parishioners from Saint Casimir and Saint Stanislaus organized a campaign to publicly protest the boundary regulation. Parishioners picketed in front of both parishes and, according to a witness, “dissuaded anyone from entering.”²⁰⁸ According to reports, the picketers were successful: no one attended Mass at either parish on the first Sunday of the protest. The picketing, therefore, would continue.²⁰⁹

According to an article published in a local Polish-language newspaper, *Tygodnik Gorniczy* (*The Miners’ Weekly*), the chairman of the joint protest committee stressed “we are fighting [not] with religion but with injustice.” Committee members urged protesters to not fear the interference of Pennsylvania state police, but to keep up their picketing. Thus, members of both Saint Casimir and Saint Stanislaus resolved to maintain their solidarity, which, according to the article, “is based on condition in the miners union – that he who brakes the resolution and goes where he should not go is called a ‘scab’ in polish ‘strup.’”²¹⁰ The article concluded by noting “that according to the holy Bible, the voice of the people is the voice of God. Times are changing, what was possible before, today will not be tolerated by people who will not accept the yoke forced on them.” After failing to get Mickun and Zmich to agree to renounce the boundaries, the protest committee met again. “There remains nothing else but a strike and a strike

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ No label, July 19, 1937, Dougherty Collection, 80.8147, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

to finish,” a report of the meeting in *The Miners’ Weekly* read, “In a short time we will see who will lose – the injured people who have nothing to lose, because these people have no right to the parish property built by the sweat of the polish people.”²¹¹

In August, the protesters adopted an interesting strategy: they threatened to remove their two thousand children from the parishes’ parochial schools and enroll them in Shenandoah public schools. Doing so would not only be an insult to the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia, but also would pressure the local school district to get involved in the conflict. According to newspaper reports, more than eight hundred Roman Catholics registered their children in public schools for the upcoming school year. In addition, the pews of Saint Casimir and Saint Stanislaus remained emptied for five consecutive Sundays. Encouraged by their success, the protesters expanded their efforts and started to also picket weekday Masses. According to a report by Rev. Zmich, support continued to grow for the protest in both parishes.²¹² The joint protest committee again petitioned Archbishop Dougherty, who still did not reply to their first petition delivered four months earlier. Again, they asked the archbishop to “rescind” the parish boundary lines. Giving him one week to reply, the petitioners threatened to continue boycotting services at both parishes and to start burying their dead on their own.²¹³

People on both sides of the boundary-centered conflict in Shenandoah’s Polish Catholic community were well aware of the possibility of schism. The PNCC established a parish not only in Shenandoah in 1922, but also in the nearby towns of Frackville (1922), Hazleton (1923), Middleport (1927), McAdoo (1929), Summit Hill (1930),

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ Letter to Cardinal Dougherty from John A. Miernicki, Esquire, 1937.

Minersville (n.d.) and Shamokin (n.d.); as well as a little further away in Allentown, Bethlehem and Reading (all 1927). From the perspective of Roman Catholic authorities, schism was a real threat in eastern Pennsylvania. Articles in local Polish-language newspapers, for example, pointed out how the conflict in Shenandoah was benefiting the PNCC parish of Holy Ghost: “because the people are accustomed to flock there where the danger of boundary division does not threaten them.”²¹⁴ Roman Catholic clerical leaders showed upmost concern over the threat of schism in their correspondence to each other. For example, in a letter to Monsignor J. Carroll McCormick (Archbishop Dougherty was in Rome at the time), Rev. Mickun warned of serious repercussions should the protests be allowed to continue: “be aware that it will be difficult to correct this in the future, especially that many of them are seriously thinking of joining the Independent Church.” The Saint Casimir pastor reminded the monsignor of the 1920s boundary-turned-property dispute that led five hundred families to the organize “the Polish Independent Church.” “From Sept 23, 1936, when His Eminence [Dougherty] commanded us emphatically to observe these boundaries,” Mickun wrote, “we have literal hell in both parishes.”²¹⁵

In September 1937, one year after implementing the enforcement of parish boundaries in Shenandoah, Archbishop Dougherty proposed to change the lines.²¹⁶ Less than two weeks later, he met with two representatives of the joint protest committee and their attorney.²¹⁷ In the end, Shenandoah lay Catholics successfully forced the archbishop to compromise in order to satisfy their demands. Thus, despite the protest ending, people began attending Mass again, and schism was avoided.

²¹⁴ No label, July 19, 1937.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ Letter to Cardinal Dougherty from John A. Miernicki, Esquire, 1937.

5.5 CONCLUSION

Sometimes, Catholic communities carried on relatively free from conflict, despite having conditions seemingly predisposed to Independentism or schism. Saint George Roman Catholic Church in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, for example, long had conditions ripe for schism: from its first attempts to organize in the late 1870s, through its early years in the 1910s and well into the 1930s. It did not, however, break away, despite its many members who could be classified as schismatic sympathizers over the years. In a letter to Archbishop Dennis Joseph Cardinal Dougherty, its pastor explained why eight hundred of his parishioners did not make their Easter duty in 1933. Noting his annual report's inclusion of "all so called Lithuanian Catholics, whether they belong to our parish or not," the priest noted that of the nine hundred four families on record, only five hundred six (56%) can be called "loyal and practical Catholics."²¹⁸ The remaining three hundred ninety-eight families (44%), he explained, are of two "types": 1.) "The indifferent type, known among our people as free-thinkers, or nationalists," and 2.) "the type, who are in principle either Socialists or Communists, better known as Bolshevicks [sic]."²¹⁹ These so-called "types" of Catholics – potential troublemakers for Roman Catholic bishops and clergy – were not a rarity in immigrant Catholic America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What was rare, however, was lay Catholics' resorting to schism to resolve their parish- and diocesan-level conflicts.

In late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century America, the Roman Catholic parish was a place where immigrants battled not only with priests and bishops, but

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ Letter to Cardinal Dougherty from Rev. Joseph A. Karalius, Feb. 2, 1934, Dougherty Collection, 80.6462, PAHRC, Wynnewood, PA.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

also with each other over the issue of control within their parishes. The most extreme parish- and diocesan-level conflicts led to schism from the Roman Catholic Church. In Cleveland, Ohio, Buffalo, New York, Chicago and Scranton, Pennsylvania, schisms grew into sizable Independent Catholic movements. However, schisms were exceptional. Even though most Roman Catholic parishes that experienced conflict did not see schism, the same factors that caused schism and the formation of Independent Catholic parishes were prevalent in Catholic communities that had significant immigrant populations. Conflict and the threat of schism directly influenced the actions of members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, as many chose to compromise with troublemaking lay people rather than risk losing souls to schism. In the end, the Roman Catholic Church was mostly successful in its deliberate attacks on Independentism and schism. Hence, the Polish National Catholic Church has remained an oddity in the story of Catholics' road from oppression to acceptance in modern America. Schism, however, was not the end result of conflict in Catholic America: conflict in American Catholic history encompassed much more than schism.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

Schism, although the most visible outcome of conflict in American Catholic history, is best understood not as the end result of conflict, but as an indicator of conflict. Conflict in American Catholic history encompassed more than schism: in addition to schismatics, near-schismatics and sympathizers must also be included in a history of conflict in Catholic America. For example, a history of conflict in Catholic Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, would thus include not only members of Holy Ghost Polish National Catholic Church (schismatic), but also the Roman Catholic parishes of Saint Casimir, Saint George and Saint Stanislaus (near-schismatic and sympathetic). The term Independentism is best understood in a broad sense: across late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century immigrant America, Catholics formed and joined separate, yet still self-described “Catholic,” religious institutions, but they often did so only briefly or nearly. Thus, a study of conflict, and not just schism, in American Catholic history uncovers a laity that did not simply “pray, pay and obey,” but actively sought to shape their parishes to best fit their spiritual needs.

Knowingly risking physical, psychological, social and material “injuries,” lay Catholics strategically disobeyed Roman Catholic Church authorities in their attempts to secure the control they sought within their parishes. Lay Catholics most wanted to control elements of parish life that they deemed to part of the parish’s temporal sphere. From their perspective, the administration of parish property, finances and employees

(especially priests) was best left to the supervision of parishioners through a board of duly-elected trustees. Thus, priests who strayed outside their duties in their parish's spiritual sphere by attempting to exert control over elements of their parish's temporal sphere risked being targeted by their parishioners for removal. Incompatible views of what composed the two spheres of parish life laid at the heart of many conflicts between lay Catholics and their priests and bishops in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Working-class immigrant lay Catholics sought to resolve parish- and diocesan-level conflicts to their advantage by the use of four types of strategies: militant, diplomatic, legal and schismatic.

In their battles for control within parishes, lay Catholics made frequent use of militant strategies including priest lockouts, mob actions and rioting. Confrontational, aggressive and violent acts functioned to heighten a community's awareness of a parish-level conflict in order to rally internal and external support. However, particular incidents of militancy were only indicators of parish- and diocesan-level conflict: unrest in any single Catholic community often spanned several decades and involved multiple generations of parishioners, priests and bishops. The ebb and flow of conflict in the Catholic community of Shenandoah, therefore, is not unique. Many immigrant Catholic communities across the United States and Canada likewise experienced multiple conflicts in numerous Roman Catholic parishes. Occasionally, these types of particularly troubled communities gave rise to schisms, such as in Shenandoah, decades after the first signs of conflict.

In addition to strategic acts of militancy, lay Catholics also made use of diplomatic conflict-resolution strategies. By sending letters and petitions to Roman

Catholic bishops, lay Catholics sought to remove or install particular priests and to secure permission to establish new parishes. Lay Catholics strategically articulated their parish-level struggles in terms of language and ethnicity in order to evoke the sympathy of outsiders. In order to persuade bishops to resolve their parish-level conflicts in their favor, lay Catholics highlighted the spiritual aspects of what they framed as language- and ethnic-based conflicts. For example, a priest's incompetence in the language of his parishioners would hamper his ability to hear confessions. Without confession, a Catholic could not receive Communion, thus forcing someone who very much desired to be a "good Catholic" into a state of spiritual anxiety. Lay Catholics hoped that bishops would find such an argument more compelling than any control-related quarrels they may have had with their pastor. However, their pleas often fell on deaf ears, thus permitting conflicts to continue, grow and even beget schisms.

The battle for control within the Roman Catholic parish was very much a laity-led battle to implement democratic practices within the American Church. Their many efforts to do so show that lay Catholics believed democracy to be not only compatible with Catholicism, but also best for the American Roman Catholic Church. A study of conflict in Catholic America reveals a laity that tried to transform its Church to better fit its democratic context in the United States. Roman Catholic priests and bishops, on the contrary, saw democracy as incompatible with the Roman Catholic Church and thus actively sought to thwart lay Catholics' attempts to implement democratic practices within the Church. Thus, with internal adjustments starting in the nineteenth century (e.g., council decrees), Roman Catholic authorities sought to eliminate lay trusteeism

and lay ownership of parish property throughout the American Church. Successfully doing so, however, was often challenging in the context of the secular legal system of the United States with its many variations of state law.

The largest waves of conflict in Catholic America occurred in the 1890s (the height of Independentism) and again in the 1920s (the height of growth in the number of Independent Catholic parishes, especially PNCC parishes). Independentism, however, failed to develop into a permanent challenge to the American Roman Catholic Church. When conflict is regarded as commonplace rather than exceptional, the question “Why did conflict sometimes lead to schism?” gives way to the question “Why did conflict not lead to more schism?” Most significantly, Roman Catholic priests and bishops actively sought to prevent and discourage schism. Often, this was achieved through compromise, such as in the creation of new ethnic parishes. Conflict, as well as schism, was also frightened away: many Catholics truly feared negative spiritual and social consequences resulting from being labeled disobedient and, especially, from leaving the Roman Catholic Church and joining a schism. In addition, better-established Independent Catholic churches lacked resources to fulfill many requests for assistance in the establishment of new Independent Catholic parishes.

The PNCC is the most evident result of conflict and schism in American Catholic history. Today, the Church claims more than twenty-five thousand members in one hundred twenty-four parishes in seventeen U.S. states, three Canadian provinces and Italy. The Polish Catholic Church (*Kościół Polskokatolicki*), which originated as a mission Church of the PNCC in 1918, claims eighty parishes in Poland. In its entire history, the PNCC has had at least three hundred parishes under its jurisdiction in the

United States and Canada.¹ As of 1957, the PNCC claimed approximately 100 parishes in Poland. In addition, the PNCC had several parishes in Brazil. The Lithuanian National Catholic Church and the Slovak National Catholic Church operate within the structure of the PNCC in the United States. In addition to Polish, Lithuanian and Slovak ethnic parishes, the PNCC also had Italian, Croatian and Hungarian ethnic parishes. Unfortunately, even what would seem to be basic information on these churches (e.g., name, location, date of foundation, date of inactivity, language of parish and names and tenures of pastors) is incomplete. No one has estimated the number of Roman Catholics who were involved in Independent Catholic churches, which include PNCC parishes, those which remained Independent and those which returned to the Roman Catholic Church, joined other churches or dissolved.

Structurally, the PNCC remains a democratic Church, as it was when it was founded. Article XVII of the PNCC Constitution (originally written by Prime Bishop Francis Hodur in 1897) reads: “The government: – This Church (Congregation) is a democratic body, it means, that in matters of economics and of social nature, is subject to the control of those, who constitute the organization.”² Today, priests and lay delegates from all parishes meet every four years at a general synod in order to discuss church matters, interpret religious teachings, select bishop candidates and establish church policy, law and discipline. Members of the Supreme Council meet annually to review business matters that concern the entire Church. Diocesan synods are held in between each general synod in order to enact laws pertinent to the diocese. PNCC members are represented by priests and lay delegates. Also at the diocesan level, lay

¹ I have identified 289 PNCC parishes in the United States and Canada. 300 is my current estimate. I expect the actual number to be somewhat higher.

² *PNCC Constitution* (Scranton, PA: Polish National Catholic Church, 1940), 31.

and clerical delegates attend to business matters that concern the whole diocese at diocesan councils. At the parish level, parish committees function to assist pastors in the running of parishes. Members of the laity, elected by their fellow parishioners to represent them, are involved at every level of the operation of the PNCC.

Noting how the PNCC Constitution “is patterned after the Constitution of the United States of America,” Prime Bishop Leon Grochowski (1953-1969) explains how the PNCC was also patterned “after the early Apostolic Church.”³ He writes: “It is our conviction that the Apostles having spent three years in the Seminary of our Lord Jesus, were instructed by their Master on what governing principles they might establish His future Church and how its mission should be led.”⁴ In other words, Jesus intended his Church to be a democratic Church unlike the Roman Catholic Church, which Grochowski hints at by writing: “History has proven that dictatorships have not proven practical.”⁵ In addition, parish property belongs to the members of each PNCC parish, not to the bishop of their diocese. The final principle in the *Eleven Great Principles of the Polish National Catholic Church* reads: “The owners and controllers of National Church property are the Polish people, those who build, maintain and believe in this Church. The bishops and priests are its guardians with the consent of the people...”⁶ It is in these structural ways, as well as its abolishment of mandatory clerical celibacy in 1921, that the PNCC most differs from the Roman Catholic Church.

³ Leon Grochowski, “New Paths,” in *Rola Boża/Przebudzenie/God’s Field: Bishop Franciszek Hodur: 1866-1966* (Scranton, PA: Polish National Catholic Church, 1966), 45.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.* Interestingly, Grochowski, as Prime Bishop of the PNCC (1953-1969), made moves to establish better relations with the Roman Catholic Church. For example, he invited several Roman Catholic priests to attend the Twelfth Synod of the PNCC in 1967, one of whom actually attended.

⁶ *The Confession Of Faith and the Eleven Great Principles of the Polish National Catholic Church in Polish and English* (Scranton, PA: Polish National Catholic Church, 1975), 38.

Most attempts at Independentism, however, were not ultimately successful. It is largely thanks to the PNCC's longevity, and hence its ability to create its own publications and preserve its own archives, that an alternative history of Catholicism in America exists to rival that of the Roman Catholic Church. Although embarrassed by the many attempts at Independentism, Roman Catholic authorities were relieved that most, unlike the PNCC, were short-lived. However, for lay Catholics who emotionally, spiritually and financially invested themselves in organizing Independent Catholic churches, their typically short lifespans were disheartening failures. Both sides – Roman Catholics and near-schismatics – believed it better to forget and move on afterward. However, the history of not only schism, but also conflict, should be restored as part of American Catholic history. Understanding the complexities of such conflict is essential to understanding the experience of Catholicism (not just Roman Catholicism) in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century immigrant America. Lay Catholics, as the adage suggests, did not just simply “pray, pay and obey.” Not only did they often disobey, but they also did so strategically. By employing militant, diplomatic, legal and schismatic strategies in their battles for control within their parishes, working-class immigrant Catholics shaped and transformed the Roman Catholic Church and Catholicism in America.

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