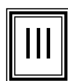

The Way Things Used to Be in American Cities: Jews, Protestants, and the Erosion of Catholic Exceptionalism, 1950-2000

Gerald Gamm

Requiem for St. Brigid's: St. Brigid's parishioners still mourn for their church. They gathered in the church's parking lot for a Mass and candlelight vigil on the night of June 30, 1999, exactly five years after their church had been closed. Someone had placed six daisies in a vase in the church doorway, with a single candle and a sign reading, "God is welcome everywhere except Van Ness and Broadway" (Madden 1999). Rev. Cyril O'Sullivan, who had been a priest at St. Brigid's when the closing had been ordered by the archbishop of San Francisco, celebrated the Mass. "St. Brigid is my spiritual home," one parishioner explained. "I've never been a good Catholic, but I still feel that St. Brigid is good for my spirit and this is true for countless members who, like me, are feeling a gut-wrenching sense of loss and bereavement" (Madden 1999).

John Quinn, archbishop of San Francisco, had closed nine of the city's 53 Roman Catholic churches in 1994. In closing the churches, Quinn explained that several factors had led him to the decision. These factors included a shortage of priests, the cost of repairs to older church buildings, dwindling numbers of parishioners, and the changing demographics of the city's population—the urban exodus of white Catholics to the suburbs and the influx of Asians, most of whom are non-Catholic.

When the decision was announced, Catholics in the affected parishes had immediately protested. St. Brigid's parishioners met with Archbishop Quinn, offering to raise the millions of dollars necessary for the seismic upgrading of not only their own church but also a church in a poorer parish. But the archbishop rejected the proposal. "Money would not be a factor," an archdiocesan spokesperson explained. "Just because a parish might be able to afford to pay for the [seismic] retrofit, that would not be a reason for not closing them. That would be unfair to poorer parishes who could not afford it" (Fernandez 1994a). Parishioners from several of the parishes appealed directly to Rome for assistance, but the Vatican ultimately upheld Quinn in his decision to close the

churches and consolidate his parishes.

"We have encountered a medieval authoritarianism," Robert R. Bryan, chairman of the Committee to Save St. Brigid's Church, declared. "The indifference to viewpoints from the pews is out of keeping with what the modern church is preaching—that the laity is the church. We love it and want to keep it alive. But we are rebuffed" (Leary 1995). From the perspective of St. Brigid's parishioners, their archbishop's determination to close their church was arbitrary and unjust. To them, Archbishop Quinn was the embodiment of an institution that had made no accommodation to the modern world and to the principles of American democracy.

Although St. Brigid's parishioners were correct in recognizing the continued strength of hierarchical authority in the Catholic church, they paid less attention to the ways in which the church had changed in recent decades. In the 1950s, Catholic churches in the United States had differed fundamentally from their Protestant and Jewish counterparts. Where Jews and most Protestants had identified with their congregations on a purely voluntary basis in the 1950s, most Catholics had been assigned to their churches according to a system of territorial parish boundaries. Where Jews and Protestants had long regarded their synagogues and churches as portable—as institutions that often closed, either permanently or as part of a process of relocation from one part of a city to another—Catholics in the 1950s had belonged to parishes that were rooted and permanent. And where Protestants and Jews had governed their own institutions, hiring (or not) their own ministers and priests, Catholics had accepted the absolute authority of their priests, who in turn accepted the authority of their bishops without question.

On all three dimensions—*membership*, *rootedness*, *and authority*—the differences between Catholic institutions and those of Protestants and Jews had once been stark (Gamm 1999). By the 1990s, however, Catholic exceptionalism had nearly come to an end. The closing of St. Brigid's Church testified to this transformation.

Membership in 1994 was no longer territorial. Challenging the claim that St. Brigid's remained the center of a vital parish, Bill Mitchell, an archdiocesan spokesperson, noted that "almost half of those attending Mass on a given weekend come from outside the parish boundaries" (Fernandez 1994b). He also suggested that parishioners who were willing to raise money to save St. Brigid's could instead "help other parishes even if their own church is closed" (Fernandez 1994a).

Rootedness, of course, was decisively repudiated with the decision to close St. Brigid's and eight other churches—one-sixth of the city's Catholic churches. "This is exceedingly painful for the parishioners, and exceedingly painful for me," Archbishop Quinn had stated in 1992, when he announced the first of the church closings. His announcement, the *San Francisco Chronicle* observed, "marks the first time in anyone's memory that a Catholic parish has been shut

down in San Francisco" (Lattin 1992). Although a Catholic parish can never be portable, like a Protestant church or Jewish synagogue that relocates to a suburban site, neither can it any longer make a claim to permanence.

And *authority* itself was under radical assault in San Francisco. Bishops and priests in the 1950s had exercised their authority without challenge. No more. St. Brigid's parishioners questioned their archbishop in public protests, in a private audience, in San Francisco newspapers, and in their challenge to the Vatican. In protesting their church's closing from the church pulpit in the last weeks of St. Brigid's existence, parishioners defied a direct order from Archbishop Quinn (Fernandez 1994a). Even a priest in St. Brigid's publicly opposed the closing, which led the archbishop to assign him to a parish in Marin County and to rebuke him for actions that were "gravely disruptive and a source of scandal and confusion" (Ludlow 1994). Meanwhile, 42 San Francisco priests supported the parishioners' appeal to Rome, arguing in their petition that "the process had not allowed for adequate input and consultation with the parishioner" (Leary 1995). Although Archbishop Quinn still possessed the authority to close the nine churches, parishioners and even many clergy had called his judgment into question, a situation nearly unprecedented in the annals of modern American Catholicism.

Neighborhood Attachments

Until the 1960s, the Catholic parish had provided bedrock for the nation's urban neighborhoods. Rules of the Catholic church frustrated the suburban exodus of Catholics, even as different institutional rules facilitated the outmigration of Protestants and Jews. Because of membership rules, Catholics identifying with a territorial parish were required to sever ties to their church if they moved beyond the parish boundaries. For a couple active in the parish sodality and St. Vincent de Paul Society, with children in the parish school, suburbanization entailed obvious costs. Baptisms, first communions, weddings, and funerals: the sacraments that marked the progression of a family's life could be celebrated only in the local parish church. In the postwar era—as the automobile, the G.I. Bill, highways, and tracts of new suburban homes all drew Catholics, like other urban residents, to the suburbs, and as redlining and racial integration changed the contours of old neighborhoods—Catholic churches remained firmly anchored in the city, buttressed by rules of rootedness and authority. The parish church, which could not move and whose existence was guaranteed by a diocesan hierarchy, became a bastion of stability in an otherwise-uncertain urban milieu (Gamm 1999).

Among white ethnic groups, Catholics have been especially likely to remain in traditional urban neighborhoods. "While the proportion of whites in the northern cities has been declining, the proportion of Catholics has been increasing," a member of the Philadelphia Catholic Housing Council asserted in 1959 (McDermott 1959, 158, as quoted in McGreevy 1996, 132). Between the early 1950s and the early 1970s, the proportion of Catholics in Brooklyn's

white population rose from 26 to 44 percent. In the same years—even as the total number of Catholics in the Boston neighborhoods of Dorchester and upper Roxbury fell from 137,000 to 95,000—the proportion of Catholics in the area's white population rose from 59 to 73 percent (Gamm 1999).

The twentieth-century exodus from Jewish neighborhoods occurred earlier, faster, and more thoroughly than the exodus from Catholic neighborhoods—and with much less violence. White Protestants, who had begun suburbanizing earlier in the century than either Jews or Catholics, appeared, like Jews, to put up little resistance. "In the face of the outward march of Hibernian and Jew," two settlement-house workers wrote in the 1910s, describing the recent transformation of a Boston neighborhood, "the Yankees have girt their garments well about them, snatched up their skirts that so much as a hem might not be defiled by contact with 'foreigners,' and have betaken them elsewhere in a spirit little and shallow, if not mean and snobbish" (Booth and Tead 1969, 149).

Catholic resistance to racial change is a constant theme in studies of almost every American city. "No instance has been noted in the literature where a Negro invasion succeeded in displacing the Irish in possession of a community. Yet, frequently, as notably in New York and Chicago, Negroes have pushed forward in the wake of retreating Jews," Ernest W. Burgess wrote in 1928 (Burgess 1928, 112). Douglass, in his 1924 study of St. Louis, documented the flight of middle-class white Protestants westward, as they abandoned a succession of neighborhoods to white ethnics and blacks. According to Douglass (1924, 70), "Parallel westward movements of Negroes and Hebrews have been evicting white Protestant populations from the center of the city for fifty years." Decades later, in Canarsie, Jonathan Rieder wrote, it was "the local wisdom that Jews run while Italians stand fast" (Rieder 1985, 27). Harvey Luskin Molotch, studying racial change in Chicago's South Shore in the 1960s, reported that residents believed "that Catholics (as opposed to Jews) have been more likely to remain" (Molotch 1972, 91 n.11).

If Jews and Protestants tended to leave their neighborhoods more quickly than Catholics, they also tended to greet new African-American neighbors with higher levels of tolerance and with little violence. In Chicago, according to Arnold R. Hirsch, racial change in the large Jewish district of North Lawndale occurred with none of the anti-black violence that routinely characterized the city's working-class Catholic neighborhoods (Hirsch 1983, 84–99, 185–200). Thomas J. Sugrue shows that the same pattern prevailed in Detroit, where African-Americans encountered little resistance in Jewish neighborhoods, but where homeowners' associations, dominated by Catholics, became organized vehicles of rabid, anti-black violence in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s (Sugrue 1995; Sugrue 1996, 241–46). The white battle against busing in Boston was waged overwhelmingly by working-class and lower-middle-class Catholics (Lukas 1985; Formisano 1991). Drawing on evidence from various

cities, John T. McGreevy notes that, for contemporary observers, "comparisons between the resistance found in heavily Catholic neighborhoods and more peaceful racial transitions in other sections of the city were inevitable" (McGreevy 1996, 103).

Catholics traditionally have had a strong sense of turf, regarding their neighborhoods as defended geographical communities. This territorial understanding of community is evident when Catholics react violently to new African-American neighbors and when Catholics choose to stay in their neighborhood if it is successfully integrated. But blacks have not been the only targets of white Catholic resistance. Catholic territoriality is also evident in the hostility with which Czech Catholics in Cicero, a working-class city near Chicago, greeted the area's first German Catholics in the 1930s (Hirsch 1983, 79), and in the fierceness with which Dorchester's Irish Catholics defended their neighborhood boundaries against Jews in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s (Gamm 1999). Protestants and Jews, in contrast, are much less likely to defend a neighborhood against outsiders. They offer little resistance, then leave quickly, when newcomers settle in the neighborhood. This behavior, too, is neither new nor necessarily driven by race. Louis Wirth, writing in 1928, argued that Jews leaving Chicago's West Side were not "being pressed out by succeeding immigrant groups and Negroes." Rather, he contended, the Jew was eagerly moving out to a higher-status district and "fleeing from his fellow-Jews who remain in the ghetto" (Wirth 1928, 245–46).

Recognizing the extent to which the attachments of Catholic residents were grounded in their parishes, organizers for the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) typically looked to Catholic parishes as essential building blocks for their work. When IAF organizers arrived in the South Bronx in the early 1980s, they understood that they needed "strong Catholic participation to be viable" (Rooney 1995, 109). South Austin, a Chicago neighborhood organized by followers of Saul Alinsky, vividly illustrated this institutional reality. "As resegregation occurred, the established Protestant churches usually disbanded or severely curtailed operations, Bailey (1974, 8) observed. "The Jewish synagogue closed and sold its building to a black Baptist sect. Only the Catholic churches survived intact."

Ancient rules binding churches and synagogues shaped the twentieth century urban battle of race and housing. Different patterns of neighborhood change have resulted from fundamental differences between Catholic institutions and Protestant and Jewish institutions. Because of these differences, a Catholic church could reassure and anchor its surrounding Catholic neighborhood, while a synagogue or Protestant church often undermined and exacerbated stresses in its surrounding neighborhood. Both types of institutions were defined, bound, and ultimately constrained by rules that dictated their own inexorable logic.

Traditional Rules: Membership

The first class of rules were the rules of *membership*. Jewish and Protestant institutional membership is entirely voluntary. The typical Protestant church or Jewish synagogue recognizes no geographical barriers to membership, while the Catholic territorial parish has historically been defined by strict physical boundaries. (The Catholic national parish, of course, represents a special case, with some resemblance, in this regard, to the Protestant model.) McGreevy, examining Catholic responses to racial change, shows how fully urban Catholics fused religion, parish, and neighborhood. “Catholics used the parish to map out—both physically and culturally—space within all of the northern cities,” (McGreevy 1996, 15) he argued. Within its boundaries, the parish church exercises monopoly jurisdiction, receiving the loyalty of all Catholics within the parish who identify with a territorial church. Catholics in Chicago’s South Shore district, according to Molotch, “identified themselves and other Catholics in terms of their parishes and seldom in terms of such community areas as ‘South Shore’ or neighborhoods like ‘The Highlands’” (Molotch 1972, 59–60).

Until the 1960s, the Catholic church interpreted its membership rules strictly. One woman wrote to the chancellor of the Boston archdiocese in the spring of 1953 to seek permission to attend St. Gregory’s Church. “My husband and I, as our families before us have always been members of St. Gregory’s Parish in Dorchester,” she wrote. “We both were baptized, received our First Holy Communion and were married in that Church. We were graduated from the Parish School.” Recently, she explained, “due to the housing situation we were forced to move two streets beyond the boundary of the Parish into St. Angela’s Parish.” But she and her husband hoped that their difficulty in finding housing would soon end. “We feel the situation is temporary as we shall move back into St. Gregory’s Parish as soon as circumstances permit,” she concluded her letter. “May we have your permission to be members of St. Gregory’s Parish?” The answer came quickly. “Although you and your family are free to attend whatever Church is more convenient to you, except for the sacraments of record, I regret that it is impossible to transfer you from one parish to another as long as your home remains in the territory of the former parish,” the vice chancellor responded. “Canon Law determines that individuals are members of the parish in whose territory their home is located and excludes the possibility of any Bishop making an exception to this law.” (Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston, as quoted in Gamm, 1999, 117–18).

Synagogues and Protestant churches, in contrast, tend not to be defined in territorial terms. As a consequence, they often compete for support and for members. “Unlike the Roman Catholic churches, those of Protestant faith do not mass their adherents in geographical areas distinct from one another,” H. Paul Douglass found. “The result is a network of geographical ties between church and home of incredible perplexity and incoherence” (Douglass 1926,

282). Robert L. Wilson and James H. Davis described the dilemma of a typical urban, white Methodist church in the 1960s. "Although the majority of the members still live in the community, many of the leaders have moved out. These persons still come back to church," Wilson and Davis (1966, 13) wrote. "The increasing numbers of commuting members has been a matter of concern to the pastor, and he views with some apprehension the possible formation of a new congregation in a subdivision where several of his more active families now reside."

The dispersion of members goes back to the nineteenth century. The filling of Boston's Back Bay, for example, spurred a migration of the city's oldest and wealthiest Protestant families into the new homes that rose along the district's wide, tree-lined streets. From their new homes, they traveled downtown to attend church. Quickly, however, they tired of the long walks and the old church buildings, and members initiated drives to erect new, statelier churches in the Back Bay itself. The Federal Street Church, a venerable Unitarian congregation located downtown, broke ground in 1859 at the corner of Arlington and Boylston streets, for the Arlington Street Church. In the 1860s and 1870s, the Central Congregational Church, as well as five churches of colonial origin (among them the First, Second, and Third Churches) were all pulled by their members into the Back Bay. The Third Congregational Church, which had worshiped in the Old South Church—the historic meetinghouse of the American Revolution—since the early eighteenth century, dedicated its new church in 1875, fittingly christening the structure the New Old South Church. Trinity Church, whose congregants continued commuting from the Back Bay to the South End through the 1860s and into the 1870s, dedicated its new building, masterwork of H. H. Richardson, in Copley Square in 1877 (Whitehill 1959, 164–69).

Throughout the twentieth century, too, Protestant churches and Jewish synagogues have struggled to respond to far-flung memberships. Temple Mishkan Tefila, which moved in the 1950s from Roxbury to the Boston suburb of Chestnut Hill, had supported a large suburban membership for three decades (Gamm 1999, 232). In Los Angeles, Sinai Temple's leaders watched as their members commuted ever-farther distances, finally moving the temple from Fourth and Hampshire to "the fashionable far western end of Wilshire Boulevard" (Vorspan and Gartner 1970, 260). Adath Israel–Brith Sholom, Louisville's leading Reform congregation, relocated in 1980, responding to a membership that was moving away from the old temple's location. Similarly, leaders of the Metropolitan Baptist Church, who announced in the spring of 2000 the church's plans to move from Washington, D.C., to Prince George's County, noted that many members of the church commuted into the city. Rev. H. Beecher Hicks, pastor of the church, stated that "45 percent of the church's congregation lives in Maryland" (Harris 2000).

At mid-century, leaders of Conservative Judaism radically reinterpreted

Jewish law to respond to the scattered memberships of established congregations. In a 1950 document, Conservative rabbis declared that it was permissible for Jews to drive to their synagogue on the Sabbath—traditionally regarded as a blatant violation of Sabbath observance—so long as they were driving to worship in their temple (Waxman 1958, 351–74). Reviewing the decision ten years later, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (1960) emphasized that some rabbis regarded travel as permissible only as an "emergency measure," while others justified the decision as "indispensable under modern conditions where people live in widely scattered areas and often at great distances from the synagogue."

Rules of membership allow Jews and Protestants to move to a suburb without severing institutional ties with urban churches and synagogues, easing the transition to a new community. In contrast, at least until the 1960s, a parishioner's loyalty to a non-ethnic Catholic church required a home in the parish. Consequently, in moving from their old neighborhood, Catholics had to leave behind their parish church, their parish grammar school, and their parish social activities. Thus Catholics faced a much higher exit cost than Jews; following the logic of Thomas C. Schelling's model, the territorial parish reduces the likelihood of a "speculative acceleration of tipping" (Schelling 1972, 175). Loyalty, as Albert O. Hirschman suggests, "can serve the socially useful purpose of preventing deterioration from becoming cumulative, as it so often does when there is no barrier to exit" (Hirschman 1970, 79). By conditioning institutional loyalty on neighborhood loyalty, the Catholic parish reinforced neighborhood stability and frustrated out-migration.

Traditional Rules: Rootedness

The rules limiting membership in the church to parish residents are predicated on the rules that keep the church rooted and open. The Catholic church's ability to anchor its parishioners was grounded in the credibility of its continued presence in a neighborhood. The second class of rules, therefore, were the rules of *rootedness*. One aspect of rootedness is structural rootedness. The other aspect is geographical rootedness. The Catholic church was traditionally a permanent structure, consecrated to God and built around a permanent altar, and the territorial parish's relationship to its neighborhood was inalienable (Gamm 1999). "Real-estate agents welcome the coming of a Catholic church into a community," according to a 1934 study, "for it is regarded as an evidence of permanence, and almost invariably it tends to increase the value of the neighboring property" (Silcox and Fisher 1934, 69, as quoted in McGreevy 1996, 21).

Jewish and Protestant congregations, in contrast, move freely from building to building and from one residential district to another. Between 1885 and 1898, Boston's three oldest synagogues each relocated from the tenement district where they had been founded to a new, more refined neighborhood in the upper South End (Gamm 1999, 100–101, 104–5). Two of the three congrega-

tions moved again in the 1900s—Adath Israel to the city's Fenway district, Mishkan Tefila to the Dudley Street district of Roxbury. Again, two of the three moved in the 1920s, when Mishkan Tefila and Ohabei Shalom built their historic temple structures, one on Roxbury's Elm Hill and the other in the wealthy suburb of Brookline (Gamm 1999, 136–38). When Mishkan Tefila moved yet again in the 1950s, this time to the suburban district of Chestnut Hill, it was responding to the migration of its members in well-established form (Gamm 1999, 232–33).

Temple Emanu-El, the landmark Reform congregation on New York's Upper East Side, began life in downtown Manhattan in the 1840s, moving uptown in a series of steps over succeeding decades—to 12th Street in 1854, to 43d Street in 1868, to its monumental building at 65th Street and Fifth Avenue in 1930. "The character of Fifth Avenue near 43rd Street had altered; no longer residential, it was by then a noisy, commercial part of city life," according to the congregation's history. Louis Marshall, the congregation's president, "believed that the Congregation would be well served if it seized the opportunity to purchase the Astor mansion at 65th Street, a location convenient to all of Manhattan and an area guaranteed to remain residential as long as Central Park continues to exist" (Emanu-El, 2001).

"Even the Orthodox are beginning to respond to the same pressures as the other white groups," Albert J. Mayer observed, in his analysis of change in Detroit's Russell Woods neighborhood in the 1950s. "One of the most Orthodox organizations—a *yeshivah*—has purchased land in one of the 'Northwest' Jewish neighborhoods" (Mayer 1960, 212). In Houston, as African-Americans began moving into established Jewish districts in the southeastern section of the city in the 1950s, large numbers of Jews began moving to Houston's southwestern neighborhoods. Jewish institutions—the area's leading synagogues and the Jewish Community Center—joined this migration (Maas 1989, 68). Har Sinai, Baltimore's oldest Reform congregation, announced plans in 1995 to relocate from the city to the county, "where more and more Jewish families have been moving" (Apperson 1995).

Of course, Jewish institutions are not alone in their mobility. Manhattan's leading Protestant churches followed the city's affluent population uptown, much as Boston's churches relocated to the Back Bay. The Church of the Ascension, the First Presbyterian Church, and Grace Episcopal Church all moved to Fifth Avenue in the 1840s. The financial and social incentives for relocation were compelling. "Even a fashionable church lost much of its congregation and income if its neighborhood started to decline," Lockwood (1976, 219) argued. Thus St. Bartholomew's moved, and Christ Church and the Brick Presbyterian Church joined in the march northward. As the city's leading Protestant churches abandoned their old structures downtown, the Catholic diocese in many cases assumed ownership of the churches (Lockwood 1976, 220).

Douglass, studying the relocation of St. Louis' Protestant churches, found that most of the city's principle Protestant churches, unlike its Catholic churches, had moved to the West End, a small geographical area where the city's wealthiest residents made their homes. "Some of the oldest and most influential have reached their present sites as the result of a series of removals following upon large movements of population. They almost merit the appellation 'migratory churches,'" Douglass (1924, 61, 71) wrote. "That they should have moved as population moved was, in the main, inevitable; but that they should so largely have moved westward, in the direction of prestige and advantage to themselves, showed total lack of constructive policy and the effective will to serve all of the city equally."

Like other Protestant churches, African-American churches move from location to location. When Jews began settling in Boston's West End in the late nineteenth century, many blacks in the neighborhood left for the South End. In the middle 1900s, two black churches, the A.M.E. Zion Church and the Twelfth Baptist Church, joined in the migration, selling their structures in the West End and acquiring new buildings in the upper South End (Gamm 1995, 140–41). Two decades later, as a few middle class blacks began settling in upper Roxbury, St. Mark Congregational Church relocated to this district. Members of St. Mark, which had been located in the South End since the 1890s, recognized that their new church was not in a black district. "Many of the St. Mark members considered this move a mistake," according to the congregation's 1945 history. "They thought that the church was going too far away from the Colored neighborhood" (St. Mark Congregational Church 1945, 43). Soon, however, under the leadership of Rev. Samuel Leroy Laviscount, the congregation—and, with it, Elm Hill's middle class black community—began to prosper and grow. A second black church, Charles Street A.M.E. Church, moved to upper Roxbury in 1939. The congregation, which had been worshiping in the West End since the early nineteenth century, acquired a stone church a few blocks from St. Mark (Gamm 1999, 61).

The recent announcement by the Metropolitan Baptist Church that it is leaving Washington, D.C., for Prince George's County offers a clear reminder that Protestant and Jewish institutions remain as portable as ever. "The historic 6,000-member church, which started in 1864 with 10 freed slaves worshiping in a Civil War barracks, reluctantly concluded last month that its current location, at 13th and R streets NW in Cardoza-Shaw, poses too many obstacles to badly needed expansion," the *Washington Post* reported in January 2000 (Murphy and Gaines 2000). Tensions in its Washington neighborhood, related to the influx of white residents and antagonism over the church's use of an empty field as a parking lot, have led the church's membership to find a new site outside of the city. In Prince George's County, the Metropolitan Baptist Church will join a group of African-American megachurches that have recently moved to the suburbs. "The county has become home to many former

District congregations that have built sanctuaries the size of sports arenas. If Metropolitan moves to Prince George's, it will join 14,000-member Jericho City of Praise, off Route 202 in Landover, and 10,000-member Ebenezer AME Church, in Fort Washington," the Post reported. "Also, Evangel Church, a former D.C. congregation, is adding a 4,000-seat sanctuary on Central Avenue, and Landover Memorial plans to break ground for a huge sanctuary off Lotsford Vista Road this spring" (Harris 2000).

Rules of rootedness have meant that Jewish and Protestant institutions could survive by relocating out of a declining neighborhood and by moving out to the suburbs, but Catholic institutions have been permanently tied to their original location. Members of the typical white Methodist church described by Wilson and Davis responded to the urban exodus by considering new sites for their church. "Several persons feel quite strongly that the church ought to relocate," Wilson and Davis (1966, 14) wrote. "The insecurity about the future has been hard on congregational morale." Criticizing Hyde Park's plans for urban renewal, Monsignor John J. Egan, a spokesman for the Chicago archdiocese, complained that "the Catholic Church, unlike more mobile Protestant churches, could not abandon its 'cathedrals'" (Hirsch 1983, 165). Since successful relocation requires a healthy base of members and financial resources, Jewish and Protestant institutions generally moved out after many members had left but at a time when many still remained in the old neighborhood. Non-Catholic institutions that bided their time withered away and died at their old locations.

Traditional Rules: Authority

The third class of rules dealt with *authority*. In five distinct ways—creation and dissolution of an institution; acquisition, ownership, and disposal of funds and property; determination of policy and doctrinal questions; selection and dismissal of clergy; prerequisites for congregational worship—the rules of synagogues and most Protestant churches reflect the authority and autonomy of the individual congregation, while a Catholic church's rules reflect a system of hierarchical authority. Governed by rules that render the rabbi and any religious hierarchy superfluous, the American Jewish synagogue enjoys the purest form of congregational authority. In constrast, a Catholic parish does not exist apart from a priest and a hierarchy. "Catholic lay people cannot start a church on their own, nor can an entrepreneurial priest set up shop without Church approval," Nancy Tatom Ammerman writes. "The diocese draws parish lines and supplies parish priests" (Ammerman 1997, 330).

Rules of authority, by forcing Jewish and most Protestant institutions to guarantee their survival without outside support, ineluctably led these institutions to relocate when large numbers of their members had begun to move. No Jewish hierarchy and few Protestant hierarchies exist to sustain an institutional presence in urban neighborhoods. But, for Catholics, rules of authority mean that the local diocese can provide funding and priests for struggling

Catholic parishes. Rules of authority limit and constrain the parish's ability to determine outcomes; as Kenneth A. Shepsle argues in his study of legislatures, such rules strengthen an institution's ability to make credible commitments (Shepsle 1991, 254). While the parish's continued viability contributes to neighborhood stability, the parish could commit credibly to a long-term presence in its neighborhood only because of the rules establishing the authority of the archdiocese.

The Erosion of Catholic Exceptionalism

In the 1960s, the old rules defining the Catholic territorial parish came undone. With the collapse of these rules, the longstanding ability of the Catholic parish to anchor urban neighborhoods also began to unravel. Authority in the Catholic church remains vested in priests and bishops, but parishioners are now actively encouraged to participate in the leadership of their parishes. Even more significant for urban parishes, the Second Vatican Council established a process that has led to the decoupling of residency and church membership—effectively ending hundreds of years of Catholic doctrine that defined the typical parish in rigidly territorial terms. Finally, concomitant with these revisions to rules of authority and membership, the parish itself is now being regularly uprooted and dissolved, the victim of a shortage of priests, funds, and church-going parishioners.

Across the country, with the encouragement of the Vatican and dioceses, priests now discuss the finances and mission of their parishes in public. "Following the universal direction of Canon Law, the American bishops have instituted directives to create parish councils comprising lay people to help in the governance of parishes," (Gillis 1999, 30) notes, "but the authority and power of these bodies varies greatly depending upon the local bishop and pastor." Many dioceses have invited laity to work with clergy in planning for the consolidation of parishes and the establishment of parish clusters. Sometimes, as St. Brigid's parishioners asserted, the bishop's final authority can make this consultation seem pointless. "'The archdiocese didn't want the people to actually have ownership of the [pastoral planning] process but to perceive that they did,' says a priest who has served in San Francisco for more than 25 years," the *San Francisco Examiner* reported. "The archbishop's intractability on parish closures, says the priest, is now 'more about who is in charge than who is right'" (Fernandez 1994b). Still, in many other parishes across the country, the consultation between the pastor and parishioners is genuine and substantive. The traditional, authoritarian character of the church has softened considerably since the 1960s. Many priests and bishops work actively to promote a participatory process of decision making in their parishes and dioceses.

As another consequence of the Second Vatican Council, the centuries-old concept of the territorial parish has unraveled. Territorial parishes are no longer regarded simply as interchangeable units of a universal church. According to church doctrine since the 1960s, each parish has a unique iden-

tity. Consequently, Catholics may logically choose to identify with a parish other than the one in which they live. "Many contemporary Catholics select a parish in the same way they would shop for a school for their children, a health care facility, or a neighborhood," (Gillis, 1999, 32) writes. In many places, this "has resulted in the blurring of parish boundaries."

Rules of rootedness, like those of membership and authority, have also lost their traditional meaning. Across the United States, dioceses are closing churches and dissolving parishes. The structure and the neighborhood that it served, once regarded as inseparable and sacred, have become dispensable. In many cases, dioceses have closed ethnic parishes, as the disappearance of linguistic and cultural differences has made some churches redundant. But in many other cases, dioceses have merged territorial parishes, reflecting the abandonment of many urban neighborhoods by Catholics, as well as the scarcity of priests and funds to support urban churches. Since the late 1980s, several archdioceses and dioceses—including Detroit, Chicago, San Francisco, Boston, New York, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, and Milwaukee—have closed large numbers of churches. "'It's bad, people feel very bad,' said Josephine Kominkiewitz at Sacred Heart of Jesus Church," according to the *Washington Post*, in its account of the Chicago decision. "'People have been coming to this church all their lives. Their families have been baptized, married and buried here for generations. They feel lost. They don't know what to do'" (Peterson 1990).

The decision to close St. Brigid's Church, in San Francisco, is a product of these various changes in American Catholicism. The territorial parish, an organizational form that developed through centuries of European experience, has now withered away as a viable institution in the United States. Challenged by ethnic parishes in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the territorial parish nevertheless prospered through the middle of the twentieth century. Since the 1960s, however, the territorial parish has been destroyed by membership rules and by the inability of the Catholic hierarchy to maintain a credible commitment to vulnerable urban churches. Because parishioners now know their parishes can be closed—and because even thriving parishes do not require a local residence—Catholic parishes can no longer sustain the fierce neighborhood attachments that characterized urban Catholics for most of the last century. They have become congregational churches, similar in most respects, except their governance structure, to synagogues and Protestant churches. And, as a consequence, their effectiveness as neighborhood anchors has declined. As Joe Dignan, a lifelong parishioner of St. Brigid's explained during the 1999 candlelight vigil and Mass, "We're homeless and we're praying for [that to] change" (Madden 1999).

Issues to Keep an Eye on

Parish Closings. From the colonial period through the 1960s, Catholic parishes made credible, long-term commitments to their neighborhoods. In recent years, though, dioceses across the country have been consolidating their parishes, closing churches in unprecedented numbers. The impact of these closings on urban neighborhoods can be traumatic. What is the process within a diocese that leads to parish closings? What other actions, such as pairing parishes, have dioceses taken to cope with dwindling resources?

Black Churches and Urban Congregants. The mobility of African-American churches is evident in Prince George's County, where a set of megachurches trace their roots to Washington neighborhoods. What leads a congregation to abandon one geographical area for another? How does this exodus of churches affect the community that is left behind? Does relocation affect the relationship of the church to the inner-city poor?

Catholic Dissent. Typical accounts of lay Catholics call attention to their dissent with Catholic doctrine on issues like birth control, abortion, and the ordination of women as priests. But vigorous dissent also exists regarding the church's governance structure. The authoritarian model of the contemporary American Catholic church emerged in the last decades of the nineteenth century, and it is currently under assault. What role do lay Catholics play in decision-making at the diocesan and parish level? Does greater participation in parish governance lead to higher levels of support by parishioners, as measured by attendance and contributions?

Suburban Congregations. In the first decades of suburbanization, synagogues and churches emphasized service to their local religious communities. To what extent do congregations seek members beyond their local area? How common are social action committees and other groups whose emphasis is on community service, often in an adjacent city?

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