



JOSEPH P. LAYCOCK

THE *Seer* OF
BAYSIDE

VERONICA LUEKEN
& THE STRUGGLE TO
DEFINE CATHOLICISM

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*Veronica Lueken and the Struggle to
Define Catholicism*



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For my parents

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Preface

IN 1893 CHICAGO hosted the World's Columbian Exhibition to celebrate and honor the world's cultures. The center of the exhibition was dominated by "The White City" where visitors could find displays of Western technology. On the periphery was the Midway Plaisance, which featured living exhibits of the "primitive cultures" of the world. The Midway performances generally reflected Western fantasies of exotic cultures. Visitors could see an exhibit in which Chinese actors recreated an opium den or watch exotic dancing at the Persian "Palace of Eros."¹ The architecture of the White City and the Midway defined who was an insider and who was an outsider, who was civilized and who was primitive. Like any effective hegemony, the assumptions inherent in the Columbian Exhibition were difficult to challenge because they operated beneath the level of discourse. It was a model of the world that could only be navigated and explored using the categorical assumptions of its designers. And yet, one wonders what would have happened if one of the living exhibits from the Midway Plaisance had set up camp in The White City and declared that their culture's discoveries were just as significant, just as central to the project of civilization, as Western technocracy.

As a historian and ethnographer of American religious cultures I am drawn to groups that are understudied, misunderstood, and maligned. I learned early in my career that the academic study of religion was built with similar architectural features to ensure that outsiders remain on the outside. I cannot count how many times I spoke with peers and mentors about research projects that excited me only to be told, "Ah! You study new religious movements!" I was always frustrated by this response because the subjects of my ethnography never think of themselves as practicing new religious movements (NRMs). While the study of NRMs is important work, the category can be employed to maintain a two-tier model of religion. As J. Z. Smith wrote, "Difference is seldom a comparison between entities judged to be equivalent. Difference most frequently entails a

hierarchy of prestige and the concomitant political ranking of superordinate and subordinate.”² Like the Columbian Exhibition’s White City, some religious traditions enjoy a privileged status in the center of the field of study. Surrounding these are the “sideshows” of religious studies—the NRMs, the folk pieties, the “little traditions”—that are deemed worthy of inclusion in the field but tacitly regarded as a distraction from the “real work” occurring in the center.

I became interested in the Baysiders—who have claimed the site of the 1964–65 World’s Fair as their own—because they openly challenge these definitional boundaries. The Baysiders insist that they are *not* an NRM or a vernacular variation of Catholicism but loyal and *normal* Catholics. From their perspective, center and periphery are reversed and it is everyone else who has accepted strange variations on normative Catholic belief and practice. Unwilling to accept a place on the margins, the Baysiders regularly visit Rome and write letters to the Vatican hoping that their views and practices will be embraced by the magisterium. They also lobby local Church authorities and the media to take them seriously. In the Archives of the Diocese of Brooklyn, I found a card from a Baysider addressed to Bishop Francis J. Mugavero. It was unsigned and posed only one question, “Why is Bayside a cult?” Could there be a more naked or honest challenge to the two-tier model of religion?

The forty-year struggle of the Baysiders to be accepted as normal Catholics reminds us that definitional boundaries like “religion” and “cult” are not self-evident but exercises of power. They are the product of previous contests and they remain contestable. Just as Western imperialism provided the categories employed in the Columbian Exhibition, vested interests, notably Protestant theology, have shaped the way we think about religious categories. Ultimately there is no “center” to the field of religious studies. This means that the categories religion scholars use to organize their data are at best heuristic. At worst, they constitute what Robert Orsi has called a “hidden moral framework” that works to define “true religion” by quietly keeping certain forms of religiosity separate from and elevated above the exotic other.³

The history of the Baysiders is a case study in how these battles for religious legitimacy are fought. As in war, there are not only winners and losers but clever gambits and desperate charges, mutinies and betrayals, heroes and casualties. The conflict is important to study not only because it determines the victor but because it changes the combatants. The Baysiders have formed their understanding of themselves through their tensions with Church authorities and with society-at-large. Thus, the

two-tier model of religion not only presents a distorted view of the religious landscape, but actively molds the development of its subjects.

Research for this book consisted of archival research, oral history, and ethnography with the two Baysider groups that have access to Flushing Meadows Park. The Archives of the Diocese of Brooklyn hold several boxes of material sent to them regarding Veronica Lueken, and the archivist graciously allowed me to access this material. These boxes contained angry letters from Baysiders as well as angry letters from lay Catholics who had spoken to Baysiders. There were numerous Polaroid pictures that had been sent in by Baysiders which feature strange anomalies in the film. Accompanying letters beseeched Church authorities to recognize the streaks and shapes in the film as evidence of the supernatural. There were medical charts showing the inexplicable recovery of individuals who suffered from deadly diseases before attending Baysider vigils. Catholic leaders from every inhabited continent had written the diocese demanding why some in their flock had suddenly begun to believe that Paul VI was an imposter. People from across the country had mailed in five-dollar bills to contribute to the construction of a great basilica at St. Robert Bellarmine's. (The Church had dutifully returned all of these donations.) There were also numerous letters from Lueken herself including descriptions of her visions, strongly worded retorts to statements made by the diocese, and a Christmas card sent to the chancellor of the diocese. The files were also filled with sacramentals: Many Baysiders had mailed in letters with rosaries, saint medals, and blessed rose petals attached to them with scotch tape. Sacred objects continually tumbled out of the files as I went through them.

In June 2012, I travelled to Queens, New York, to attend the forty-second anniversary of the original apparition of Bayside. While there, I was also able to make contact with both Saint Michael's World Apostolate (SMWA) and Our Lady of the Roses Shrine (OLR). I conducted participant observation at three Sunday holy hours and three vigils, each lasting several hours, at Flushing Meadows. I took a personal tour of SMWA's workshop in College Point where I saw their offices and printing equipment and had lunch. I also attended an annual banquet organized by SMWA. In addition to speaking with Baysiders from around the world, I was also able to interview former leaders of the Bayside Hills Civic Association, Kevin Farrelly and Adrian Cornell, who witnessed the controversy in Bayside and were willing to share their memories with me. I was also able to interview Lueken's grandson, Jeremy, who speaks fondly of his grandmother but does not consider himself a Baysider.

This has not been an easy history to write. History, as they say, is written by the winners but so far this conflict has many factions and no decisive victor. I have spoken with clergy and archivists from the Diocese of Brooklyn, former presidents of the Bayside Hills Civic Association whose lives were disrupted by Baysider vigils, Baysiders from around the world, and leaders from two rival Baysider organizations that resulted from a bitter schism in 1997. Each of these factions has their own version of events and I have developed sympathies for all of them. I have tried to take all of their claims and perspectives seriously while also remaining critical and applying the rigor expected by my peers. The result is that when I sat down to write, I felt as though an entire room full of people was staring over my shoulder, clamoring that this was not how it happened, that I was being unfair, that I was being too critical of one side and too credulous of another. It is possible that the version of events told here will be upsetting to everyone involved and that I will be written off equally as an intellectual with anti-Catholic bias, a cult apologist, and an agent of Satan sent to discredit the Bayside Prophecies. If all parties involved find my version of history objectionable, I will take this as a sign that I have achieved some degree of objectivity or at least spread my prejudices equally.

I have many people to thank for the completion of this project. I should begin with the wonderful faculty at Boston University, especially Stephen Prothero, David Frankfurter, Jon Roberts, Christopher Lehrich, and Thomas Michael. I am also deeply grateful for the input of Robert Orsi, Julie Byrne, and Ronald Brown. I am indebted to Joseph Coen, the archivist of the Diocese of Brooklyn, for allowing me to access primary documents and for always maintaining historical neutrality, and to Katherine Newburg who spent two days in a basement helping me sort through said documents. I am grateful to the workers of Saint Michael's World Apostolate for speaking with me and showing me hospitality even though they had every reason not to trust a nosey academic. Jeremy Lueken was very generous in providing an oral history of his family. Kevin Farrelly and Adrian K. Cornell were extremely helpful in providing oral history as well as historical documents. Alison McKay of the Bayside Historical Society helped to locate archival materials. Gerald P. Fogarty, S.J., and Landislas Orsy, S.J., provided important help in interpreting Vatican documents and canon law. I am grateful to Natasha Mikles who spent a very cold winter afternoon with me in Mount Saint Mary Cemetery. Finally, I must thank the wonderful editorial staff, Cynthia Read and Charlotte Steinhardt, without whose help this book could not have been written.

The Seer of Bayside

Who Speaks for Mary?

FROM 1964 TO 1965, Flushing Meadows Corona Park in Queens, New York, was the site of the World's Fair. Half a century later, the remains of the fair still define the park. The New York State Pavilion, once an exhibition hall, is now derelict. Its abandoned observation towers hover over the landscape like rusty flying saucers. Dominating the park is a twelve-story-high stainless-steel model of the Earth known as "The Unisphere." From the base of this monument, paved walkways radiate outward, leading visitors past skate-boarders, soccer fields, and ice-cream vendors. Visitors who stroll through Flushing Meadows on a Sunday morning can see another unusual sight: Near the southeast corner of the park is a small monument with a fiberglass statue of the Virgin Mary sitting atop it. Gathered around the statue is a collection of people of many ethnicities saying the rosary and reading Catholic litanies. The leaders of this group are easy to spot by their berets. The women wear pale blue berets, and the men's are white with the words "Saint Michael" embroidered across the front in green. A stone's throw away from this group is another, nearly identical statue of Mary, surrounded by a different group of people in blue and white berets also saying the rosary. The two groups do not speak to each other. In fact, they hardly acknowledge each other's presence at all. The scene resembles some sort of optical illusion. It seems more plausible that this is some trick of the light than that two similarly garbed groups would hold identical vigils so close together.

On a beautiful Sunday morning in June, I spoke with a man from Poland who had bicycled nearly ten miles that morning just to ride through the park. He was Catholic and, seeing the two Virgin Mary statues, decided to investigate. He rode up to the group closest to the road

where a friendly man in a white beret handed him some literature. On learning he was from Poland, the man in the beret brought over an older woman, her hair covered by a shawl, who was also from Poland. I watched the two speak briefly in Polish before the woman excused herself to return to her rosary. The man in the white beret went to take his turn leading the liturgy and I was left alone with the cyclist.

“Why are there two Marys?” he asked me.

I knew the answer to his question, but felt it was not my place to explain.

“They disagree on some things,” I answered.

Looking puzzled, the cyclist asked, “Well, which one is Roman Catholic?”

“They both are,” I said.

Like many other encounters I had as an outsider studying Marian devotion in the park, my brief exchange with the cyclist presented an ethical dilemma. I did not tell the cyclist, who was already sufficiently confused, that some Catholic authorities contest whether either group is actually Roman Catholic or are both quasi-schismatic movements condemned by the Mother Church. In fact, this scene in the park calls into question what it means to be Catholic. Catholic according to *whom*? The cyclist’s question also reminded me that I was an active player in these contested definitional boundaries. As an ethnographer, I was supposed to somehow be present to witness this struggle for sacred space and legitimacy without taking sides. But even my refusal to take a side was problematic. Far from being something akin to Emerson’s transparent eyeball, I was keenly aware of being an embodied being, trying not to interfere while observing a site where meaning was being created through embodied ritual practices.

The chain of events that led to there being two Marys in Flushing Meadows every Sunday actually began just after midnight on June 5, 1968, when Palestinian immigrant Sirhan Sirhan shot Senator Robert Kennedy. The next day, as Kennedy lay in the hospital, a Roman Catholic housewife named Veronica Lueken (1923–95) from Bayside, New York, was praying for his recovery when she became enveloped by an overwhelming fragrance of roses. Although the senator died late that night, Lueken’s mystical experiences had only begun. The inexplicable smell of roses continued to haunt her. She would wake up to find she had written poetry that she could not remember writing. She had prayed to St. Therese of Lisieux to save Senator Kennedy and suspected that Therese was somehow the true author of these poems. She discussed these experiences with the

priests at her parish church, St. Robert Bellarmine's, but she felt they did not take her seriously. Her husband Artie also discouraged any discussion of miracles.

As time went on, her visions became darker. In the sky over Bayside, she saw a vision of a black eagle screaming "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth!" She became convinced that these experiences signaled an impending disaster. She wrote Cardinal Richard Cushing in Boston and warned him that something terrible was going to happen. She also felt that her looming sense of dread was somehow connected to the Second Vatican Council, which had concluded in 1965. The Council had done away with the Tridentine mass, replacing Latin with English. Lueken felt that priests had begun to dismiss the Catholic traditions she had practiced since she was a girl. In 1969, she wrote a letter to Pope Paul VI and asked him to reverse these reforms.

In April 1970, the Virgin Mary appeared to Lueken in her apartment. She announced that she would appear at St. Robert Bellarmine's church in Bayside "when the roses are in bloom." On the night of June 18th, 1970, Lueken knelt alone in the rain praying the rosary before a statue of the Immaculate Conception outside her church. Here, Mary appeared to Lueken and instructed her that she was a bride of Christ, that she wept for the sins of the world, and that everyone must return to saying the rosary. Lueken announced that a national shrine should be built on the church grounds and that Mary would henceforth appear there on every Catholic feast day. Over the next two years, a small body of followers joined Lueken in her vigils in front of the statue. At each appearance, Lueken would deliver a "message from heaven," spoken through her by Mary as well as a growing cast of saints and angels. These messages typically included jeremiads about the weight of America's sins and warnings of a coming chastisement.

In 1973, Lueken's visions drew the attention of The Pilgrims of Saint Michael, a conservative Catholic movement from Quebec. The Pilgrims were also known as "the White Berets" for the hats they wore. Like Lueken, they were greatly alarmed over the reforms of Vatican II. In particular, they wanted to restore the tradition of saying the Prayer of St. Michael after mass, a tradition that had been suppressed in 1965. The White Berets declared Lueken to be "the seer of the age" and printed her messages from heaven in their newsletter. They also began organizing buses that transported hundreds of pilgrims to attend vigils in front of Lueken's parish church. Lueken's messages began to hint at global conspiracies, a coming

nuclear war, and a celestial body called “The Fiery Ball of Redemption” that would soon strike the Earth, causing planet-wide destruction.

Church authorities had tolerated Lueken’s activities for three years, but now her growing movement was creating a crisis. Meanwhile, the Bayside Hills Civic Association (BHCA) was horrified by the crowds of pilgrims who had descended on their quiet neighborhood. St. Robert Bellarmine’s church was surrounded by private homes on all sides. The residents objected to the crowds of pilgrims who often stayed until midnight. Pilgrims, they claimed, were trampling their manicured lawns and driving down the property values of their homes. The BHCA put immense pressure on the parish and the Diocese of Brooklyn to bring Lueken and her followers to heel.

When a hurried investigation by the diocese concluded that her experiences were not supernatural, Lueken was asked to cease holding her vigils at St. Robert Bellarmine’s. When she refused, diocesan officials began interrupting her vigils with a bullhorn, reading a letter from the bishop and ordering all loyal Catholics not to participate. Lueken and her followers responded that such tactics only proved how far a Satanic conspiracy had spread through the Church since Vatican II. The BHCA began holding counter-vigils and heckling pilgrims. The situation became dangerous and growing numbers of police were dispatched to keep the peace. Several residents were arrested for disorderly conduct and assaulting police officers. A few were even hospitalized after violent confrontations with police or pilgrims. These events came to be called “The Battle of Bayside.” The situation was finally resolved in 1975 when the Supreme Court of New York issued an injunction barring Lueken from holding her vigils near St. Robert Bellarmine’s. The night before agreeing to the injunction, Lueken received a message from Mary and Jesus to relocate the vigils to Flushing Meadows Corona Park.

The new vigil site was a monument marking the spot where the Vatican Pavilion had stood during the World’s Fair. Followers purchased a fiberglass statue of the Virgin Mary, which was brought to the park for vigils. The crowds only continued to grow. The Pilgrims of Saint Michael eventually withdrew their support and returned to Canada. But Lueken’s followers created an organized mission to bring the messages from heaven to the entire world. They drew in Catholics who, like Lueken, regarded the reforms of Vatican II as a betrayal of Catholic tradition. The movement created the corporation “Our Lady of the Roses Shrine,” which managed an international mailing list of thousands. Missionary efforts were led by

a group called the Order of St. Michael, who lived as a community and devoted all of their time to the mission. On June 18th, 1983, fifteen thousand pilgrims from around the world gathered in Flushing Meadows Park for the thirteenth anniversary of the apparition at Bayside.

Catholics who believed in Lueken's messages came to call themselves "Baysiders" after the original location of the apparition. Ironically, the residents of Bayside, New York, also referred to themselves as "Baysiders." They regarded the pilgrims as an invading and foreign force and were confused that they would claim this title for themselves. During the 1980s, independent Baysider chapters were established across the United States and in Canada. Lueken's messages were translated into many languages and disseminated to Catholic communities on every continent.

The Baysiders professed to be traditional Catholics loyal to canon law and the Holy See. However, their defiance of the Brooklyn diocese caused many Catholics to regard them as an insubordinate and schismatic movement. Shortly after arriving in Flushing Meadows, Lueken delivered a revelation that resolved this paradox—at least for her followers. Pope Paul VI, who had endorsed the reforms of Vatican II, was an imposter. The true pope was kept heavily sedated by the conspirators and the man now claiming to be Paul VI was actually a communist doppelganger created by plastic surgery. The Baysiders were not in rebellion against their Church; they were only questioning the orders of conspirators and imposters who had infiltrated the Church hierarchy.

In 1986, Francis J. Mugavero, bishop of Brooklyn, made an announcement reiterating that Lueken's visions were false and contradicted Catholic doctrine. Mugavero's findings were sent to three hundred bishops throughout the United States and one hundred conferences of bishops throughout the world. Despite this censure from Church authorities, Lueken's followers still identify as Catholics in good standing and they defend their views citing canon law. They contend that Lueken's visions never received a proper investigation led by a bishop, and that the diocese's dismissal of Lueken is therefore not legitimate. If anyone has violated Church law, they argue, it is the modernists whom Lueken condemned for receiving communion in the hand and other ritual transgressions that go against long-established Catholic tradition.

Lueken continued to give regular messages from heaven until her death in 1995. In total, Mary, Jesus, and a variety of other heavenly beings spoke to her over three hundred times. These messages were consolidated into a canon known as the Bayside Prophecies. Although the crowds are

nowhere near the size they were before Lueken's death, Baysiders still travel to Flushing Meadows from as far away as India and Malaysia. On the Internet, Lueken's messages have become part of a larger milieu of conspiracy theories and millennial speculation. Baysiders still await "The Chastisement" described in Lueken's messages. Many Baysiders believe that when God punishes mankind for its sins, the chastisement will take two forms—World War III, which will include a large-scale nuclear exchange, and a fiery comet that will collide with Earth and devastate the planet.

After Lueken's death, Our Lady of the Roses Shrine continued to hold vigils, promote the Bayside Prophecies, and coordinate pilgrimages to Flushing Meadows with followers from around the world. But in 1997, a schism occurred between the shrine's director, Michael Mangan, and Lueken's widower, Arthur Lueken. A judge ruled in favor of Arthur Lueken, declaring him president of Our Lady of the Roses Shrine (OLR) and awarding him all of the organization's assets and facilities. Undaunted, Mangan formed his own group, Saint Michael's World Apostolate (SMWA). Both groups continued to arrive at the movement's sacred site in Flushing Meadows where they held their rival vigils. Once again, police were sent out to keep the peace. Today, this conflict has thawed into a sort of detente. The two groups have scheduled their access to the park much as divorcees might arrange custody of their children. Their celebrations of Catholic feast days are sometimes timed such that only one group will be present in the park on a given day. For events where both groups must be present, such as Sunday morning holy hour, they alternate which group will have access to the monument. One group may set its statue of the Virgin Mary on the Vatican monument; the other must use a nearby traffic island. There is little love lost between the two groups, but they have decided it is in everyone's interest to appear professional while in the park.

The vigils continue to attract newcomers who seem drawn to the sincerity of the attendees and the aura of sanctity surrounding their outdoor rituals. Many of those who have only recently begun saying rosaries in the park seem unaware of the history of Lueken's conflict with Church authorities or the details of the schism that led to there being two Marys in the park. Many report witnessing miracles near the vigil site or share stories of people recovering from terrible illnesses after praying there. For some, Flushing Meadows is simply a special place to say the rosary.

Like the various monuments left behind from the World's Fair, the vigils are evidence of amazing events that once occurred in the park. This

book is a chronicle of these amazing events. The history of the Baysider movement is a series of contests over who has the authority to articulate a religious group's core tradition. In telling this story, I draw attention to the mechanisms by which lay communities impose their understanding of tradition over and against those of their ecclesiastical and lay opponents. The Baysiders assert their worldview not through legal arguments or proclamations but through daily, embodied practices and the strategic use of space and ritual. The Vatican Pavilion monument at Flushing Meadows Park is not only a sacred site, it is a site of epistemic power. The public rituals held there produce their own form of authority through which Baysiders are able to legitimate their understanding of the cosmos and—when they deem it necessary—even resist the authority of the magisterium.

Catholicism as an Imagined Community

As a movement, the Baysiders are defined by their seemingly paradoxical relationship with the Mother Church. Baysiders are simultaneously deeply critical of and profoundly deferential to Catholic authority. They hold vigils in Flushing Meadows against the wishes of the local diocese and yet they feel they are loyal Catholics—perhaps the last loyal Catholics left. Church authorities have also demonstrated contradictory attitudes toward the Baysiders. The official position of the Diocese of Brooklyn is that Lueken's visions are inauthentic and should not be supported. John Whelan, Archbishop of Hartford, Connecticut, took a stronger stance, claiming that in his opinion the Baysiders are heretical.¹ However, there have always been priests, monks, and nuns who support the Baysiders and attend vigils. I attended a vigil at Flushing Meadows where at least three priests were present. During the vigil, shrine leaders set up folding chairs behind the statue of Mary where these priests could take confessions from attendees. The relationship between Baysiders and Church authorities is neither static nor strictly oppositional. As Baysiders continue to try to make sense of the reforms of Vatican II, they engage Church authorities in a dance of deference and defiance. Church authorities have responded with their own dance of tolerance and censure. It is a dance that has lasted for more than forty years.

To make sense of this complicated relationship it is necessary to understand that the idea of the Catholic Church as a global and monolithic

polity is an *imagined* community. In his work on nationalism, Benedict Anderson argued that all forms of community larger than a primeval village are imagined. This is not to say that communities are illusory or “fake” but rather that ongoing conceptual work is necessary in order for individuals to feel a sense of connection with others whom they never see face to face. Religious traditions, in particular, are continuously imagined and reimagined. Leonard Primiano claimed that “‘official’ religion does not, in fact, exist.”² Rather, normative religion exists only as an ideal type. The beliefs and practices of any given individual are always a vernacular expression of an “official” tradition that exists only in the abstract. This situation in which vernacular practices are united by an imagined normative ideal is especially true of Catholicism, which has countless varied and local expressions throughout the world. But despite these differences, Catholics are able to understand themselves as part of a global polity unified through such institutional symbols as apostolic succession, the body of canon law, and, especially, the office of pope and the authority of the magisterium.

While the imagined boundaries of Catholicism frequently seem natural and undisputed, historical circumstances can call them into question, forcing a renegotiation of what it means to be Catholic. Clifford Geertz noted the paradox that religion is concerned with ultimate and immutable truth, and yet inevitably changes over time, remarking, “Nothing, apparently, alters like the unalterable.” Catholic leaders already knew this. Nearly a century before Geertz, the American Bishop John Ireland addressed the same problem when he wrote, “The church never changes and yet she changes.”³ Catholics have adopted different strategies for negotiating this paradox, leading to rival understandings of what normative Catholicism is. After Vatican II and the social changes of the 1960s, American Catholics became divided over how they remembered their own tradition. Reform-minded Catholics moved to dismiss pre-Conciliar devotional culture as a relic of the past while traditionalists celebrated and canonized it. The emergence of the Baysiders in the decade following Vatican II can be read as a historical moment in which the imagined boundaries of the Catholic polity faltered. Two Catholic cultures that had always taken for granted that they shared a common tradition became unexpectedly alienated from one another. Anthony Bevilacqua, an auxiliary bishop for the Diocese of Brooklyn, said of Lueken, “She has condemned Communion in the hand. She’s condemned the Eucharistic Ministers. She said Pope Paul VI was an imposter, that somebody else took his place. I can go on with

a thousand things. If that is authentic, we're in two different churches."⁴ Conversely, the Baysiders felt it was Church authorities who had strayed from authentic Catholicism. As Dan, a sixty-one-year-old mechanical engineer and Baysider, explained to me, "It wasn't us lay Catholics who started changing all of the traditions."⁵ In 1974, Lueken delivered an angry message from Jesus warning the clergy, "You have brought into My House all manners of whims and fancy, giving in to your carnal natures. Will you stand before Me as My representatives and say that your teaching has been pure in My sight? I shall spit you out and cast you into the fires!"⁶ This exchange of condemnations was really a debate about how the imagined boundaries of the Catholic polity ought to be drawn.

It is this mutual sense of alienation and betrayal that makes the relationship between Baysiders and Church authorities so complex, so bitter, and so tragic. Baysiders lament the reforms of Vatican II and feel that the Catholic hierarchy has been compromised by modernism. But they also reject the so-called sedevacantist movements that formed after the Council. These were groups of traditionalist Catholics who declared that the Seat of Peter is empty and that the Catholic hierarchy is no longer legitimate. Even when Lueken was most at odds with her diocese, she urged her followers not to leave the Church. The Baysiders believe in a prophecy that one day the Mother Church will come around: Waters will spring forth from the ground at St. Robert Bellarmine's as they did at Lourdes, a great basilica will be erected in Bayside, and Veronica Lueken will be canonized as "Veronica of the Cross." A leader from Our Lady of the Roses Shrine explained that when this happens, the shrine will be under the direct control of the Church and lay leadership will no longer be necessary. For Baysiders, this prophecy presents the hope that they, their clergy, and their tradition will one day be restored to a harmonious whole.

Historicizing the Definitional Boundaries of Catholicism

In the contest to define Catholic tradition, Church authorities wield an enormous advantage over the Baysiders. A stark example of this occurred in 1978 when Lueken and her followers attempted to form the legal entity "Our Lady of the Roses Shrine." The Supreme Court of New York initially denied Lueken's application for incorporation because the proposed organization did not meet the state's standards for a Catholic organization.

Article 5 of the New York Religious Corporations Law specifies that a certificate of incorporation for an unincorporated Catholic Church “shall be executed and acknowledged by the Roman Catholic archbishop or bishop, and the vicar-general of the diocese in which its place of worship is, and by the rector of the church, and by two laymen, members of such church who shall be selected by such officials, or by a majority of such officials.”⁷ Needless to say, Lueken’s group had no hope of meeting these requirements. In fact, the Diocese of Brooklyn actively attempted to block the application.⁸ Of course, Lueken and her followers did not seek to establish themselves as a Catholic “church” per se. Their application described the group’s purpose as “to print, mail, disseminate Roman Catholic information, to conduct prayer vigils, and with divine guidance keep the knowledge of God and His plan for peace and security in the hearts of all mankind.” However, Judge Arthur W. Lonschein deemed this purpose sufficient to invoke Article 5 and added in his opinion that the very *name* “Our Lady of the Roses” was suggestive of Catholicism and therefore would require the approval of Church authorities. Lonschein added:

I make no determination as to the propriety or social desirability of the incorporator’s purposes. Nor is it for me to presume to pass judgment on the religious quality or spiritual probity of the purposes of the proposed corporation.... It is not my determination that Ms. Lueken may not seek to incorporate as a religious corporation or may not seek to incorporate as a not-for-profit corporation where their purposes may not involve worship.⁹

In other words, whatever Lueken was doing was fine, so long as she conceded it was *not* Catholicism. This decision from a secular court demonstrates the incredible leverage that Church authorities have over the laity in defining the boundaries of Catholicism.

If the Baysiders were not “really” Catholics, then what were they? In the 1970s, the American media was preoccupied with the threat of subversive “cults” and several journalists applied this pejorative label to Lueken and her followers. An article in *New York Magazine* drew a parallel between Lueken and Jim Jones. *The National Enquirer* blasted the Baysiders as a cult and accused Lueken of “brainwashing” her followers.¹⁰ The few religion scholars who have written on the Baysiders have framed this group as a “new religious movement,” a form of “re-enchantment,” or “folk piety.”¹¹ While these categories have their uses, they can also obscure

the inherent messiness of the Baysiders' Catholicism. These scholarly designations all assume that Baysider Catholicism is not normative. This assumption is decidedly not shared by the Baysiders themselves, who feel that they have preserved Catholic tradition while everyone else has deviated from it. Meredith McGuire notes that the definitional boundaries that permeate the field of religion are contested and represent the exertion of power. Categories such as "mainstream Catholic" and "cult" are not objective realities but the result of a series of battles for legitimacy. In order to have a historically accurate understanding of religion, McGuire argues, scholars must historicize these definitional boundaries and pay attention to their contested nature.¹²

The Baysiders' dance of deference and defiance has countless historical precedents. While a religious tradition cannot be neatly bifurcated along the axis of "popular" and "elite," there has always been a fault-line between the vernacular practices of lay Catholics and the doctrinal positions of the Church hierarchy.¹³ While these two faces of Catholicism share much in common, they often see the world in different ways. Where vernacular Catholicism blurs the lines between sacred and profane, finding the miraculous in the local and the everyday, the hierarchy generally works to consolidate access to the sacred within prescribed times, spaces, and rituals. They employ different mechanisms and traditions for evaluating truth claims, especially claims of the supernatural and the miraculous. Perhaps most importantly, they are concerned with different audiences. Church authorities are concerned with how Catholic practices will be regarded by governments, theological and political opponents, and the culture at large. By contrast, lay Catholics rarely worry about what outsiders might think of their devotions.

Despite these differences, the two faces of Catholicism share an imagined community. Much of Catholic devotional culture represents the work of priests, nuns, and laity constructing a shared culture together. However, certain historical circumstances motivate Church authorities to police the definitional boundaries of Catholicism in ways that alienate lay Catholics. As was the case at Bayside, outside criticism often motivates the hierarchy to rein in devotional practices, either condemning them as superstition or assimilating them into an authorized canon of Catholic tradition. The Counter-Reformation was in essence a prolonged attempt by the hierarchy to assimilate and control local expressions of Catholic devotion in response to Protestant critiques. As was always the case, some of these reforms were embraced by lay Catholics while others inspired conflict and

resistance. Church authorities made similar efforts to redefine Catholic tradition in response to rationalist critics following the Enlightenment and to American Protestants who accused Catholics of “Romanism” during the nineteenth century. Different circumstances, however, have inspired Church authorities to embrace devotional culture in order to channel popular support against an outside threat. Historically, popes have endorsed popular Marian apparitions when they are associated with opposition to secular opponents such as Italian nationalists in the nineteenth century and communism in the twentieth century. In the United States, the *Roe v. Wade* decision of 1973 brought about a similar moment of alignment between Church authorities and lay Catholic culture. Cardinal Joseph John O’Connor of New York organized protests of abortion clinics and, in the mid-1980s, Baysiders came out in droves to support demonstrations organized by O’Connor. In the summer of 2012, the Obama administration’s “HHS mandate,” which would require employers to provide health coverage for contraception, inspired another moment of alignment. Baysider leaders spoke out against the mandate and felt they were fighting alongside their bishops for their rights as Catholics.

It is through this model of Catholicism as a process of conflict and collaboration between lay Catholics and Church authorities that the Baysiders are best understood. The Baysiders do not represent a deviant sect or a localized variation of Catholicism, but rather an ongoing and asymmetrical debate about what Catholicism is. Just as Baysiders have expressed reluctance to defy Church authorities, the Diocese of Brooklyn appeared torn between their desire to let lay Catholics enjoy their devotional culture and a need to protect the public image of the Church. Were it not for the disruptions created by holding massive vigils in a densely populated neighborhood and the complaints of the BHCA, Lueken might have been able to continue her vigils without censure for much longer.¹⁴ Instead, pressure continued to mount, causing the two faces of Catholic culture to become increasingly exasperated and alienated from each other. When she argued with Church authorities, Lueken discovered aspects of her own Church that were unfamiliar to her. Her parish church was not simply God’s house, it was also a legally constituted institution controlled by a parish council. The Church hierarchy was not simply an abstract symbol of the connection between her parish priests and the pope, it was revealed as a bureaucracy in which clergy obey a strict chain of command and ideals are often mitigated by political expediency. Likewise, diocesan officials felt bewildered by the response of Lueken and her followers.

Internal documents express disbelief that so many lay Catholics would take Lueken's visions seriously. When authorities attempted to stop the vigils at Bayside, they were demoralized by how little power they had to control the pilgrims. But despite this process of estrangement, there were some lines that were never crossed. Lueken always insisted that Catholics were not to leave the Church. Likewise, Church authorities never threatened Lueken or her followers with excommunication. The conflict between Baysiders and their Church does not resemble a heresiological battle between rival religions so much as a painful separation between partners whose feelings for each other have changed. In thinking about this conflict, it is relevant that the Catholic Catechism defines divorce as immoral, arguing that it "introduces disorder into the family and into society." "This disorder," it is argued, "brings grave harm to the deserted spouse, to children traumatized by the separation of their parents and often torn between them, and because of its contagious effect, which makes it truly a plague on society."¹⁵ The Catholic understanding of divorce as a social evil also applies to the relationship between the Baysiders and Church authorities, who have continued their partnership long after it has ceased to be convenient or pleasurable. This image of alienated practitioners who remain committed to their Church in bad times as well as good is often a tragic one, but it is also noble in its stoic commitment to an ideal.

Technologies of Power

Marian apparitions demonstrate the kinds of power that lay Catholics can bring to bear in defining the boundaries of Catholic culture. Scholars have disagreed as to whether the symbolic power of Mary in Catholic tradition is an inherently destabilizing influence that perpetually challenges the status quo or a form of social control exerted over lay Catholics. Victor and Edith Turner, in their analysis of Marian pilgrimages, see Mary as firmly aligned with the nonhierarchical face of Catholicism. They argue that Marian apparitions "point to the hidden, nonhierarchical domain of the Church and stress the power of the weak; the community; the rare and unprecedented, as against the regular, ordained, and normative."¹⁶ Conversely, feminist critics of Catholicism frequently argue that Mary has served as a tool for imposing patriarchal gender roles.¹⁷ In reality, Mary is neither inherently subversive nor inherently stabilizing. Like all potent religious symbols, Mary has the power to either maintain cultural institutions or challenge

them. Robert Orsi describes the figures of Catholic devotional life as “cultural double agents, constituting and destabilizing both culture and self.”¹⁸ When conflicts arise between ecclesiastical and popular Catholicism, the Virgin Mary often acts as a sort of fulcrum that determines the balance of symbolic power. This is particularly the case with Marian apparitions. While apparitional movements cannot convene councils or issue papal bulls, they have a powerful ability to shape Catholic culture through the strategic use of sacred space and embodied rituals. This power is well known to Catholic authorities as well as secular governments around the world. At various times, Church authorities have sought either to harness this power of apparitional movements or else to stamp them out.¹⁹ The fact that the Baysider movement has survived the death of its seer and continues to resist an unsupportive diocese is a testament to their power to assert their interpretation of Catholicism. While Baysiders have become conversant in canon law and presented legal arguments for the legitimacy of their movement, their ability to resist Church authority really comes from the fact that they have continuously occupied public space that they have rendered sacred through ritual. Roger Friedland and Richard Hecht describe the religious center as a “technology of power.”²⁰ Baysiders discovered that their ability to impose their own meaning onto sacred space and to assert their presence through sound gave them a kind of authority. Ironically, as the Baysiders developed into a global movement, these same technologies of power were used in internecine conflicts between rival factions of Baysiders. Jonathan Z. Smith once defined religion as “the quest, within the bounds of the human, historical condition, for the power to manipulate and negotiate one’s ‘situation’ so as to have ‘space’ in which to meaningfully dwell.”²¹ The history of the Baysiders is the story of such a quest. As a case study, it reveals much about how vernacular forms of religion employ technologies of power to alter their situation, even in the face of contested definitional boundaries.

The most important technology of power for any apparitional movement is the control of sacred space. Marian apparitions have been reported from Mexico to Cairo and from Rwanda to Japan. In almost every case, the apparition is closely linked to the location where it first appeared. Apparitional movements generally assume a powerful connection between supernatural presence and physical space. Baysiders feel that prayers are more efficacious if they are performed at the vigil site in Flushing Meadows. By saying the rosary at Flushing Meadows, they believe they are mitigating the weight of the world’s many sins and staving