

**Occupying God's House:
Catholics, Sacred Space, and the Religiosity of Postwar Italian Politics, 1954-1969**

by

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Abstract

Catholic churches in Italy were spaces of religious innovation and experimentation, social struggle, and political protests in the 1950s and 1960s. Actions undertaken by Catholics often led to conflicts with local ecclesiastical officials over who had the authority to claim the space of churches and define what could happen, and who could gather, within their walls. These disputes embodied the broader debates and challenges roiling the Catholic world over who represented the authentic core of the Church: the faithful or the hierarchy. By assembling in parish churches and urban cathedrals, Catholics projected their visions of a Church open to dialogue and devoted to the poor.

This dissertation adds to our current understanding of how the Second Vatican Council grew out of local efforts to change the Church from below, instead of being thrust on lay Catholics from on high by theologians and religious officials. In their emphasis on the central role of the “people of God” in the global Church, Catholics who protested within, and occupied, churches in the late 1960s continued their religious experimentations that began in the years and decades before, and incorporated their lived experiences of, the Second Vatican Council.

During the four sessions of the Council in Rome, conflicts among members of the Church hierarchy were fundamental to the experience, course, and later interpretations of Vatican II. At the heart of these clashes was a struggle for administrative and physical control over the space of the Council hall in St. Peter’s Basilica. Like the lay Catholics who occupied churches in the late 1960s, Council fathers sought to create a space for dialogue on global issues facing the Church. They resisted members of the Church hierarchy’s attempts to spatially inscribe power in the Council hall and limit discussion. Thus, the phenomenological characteristic of both the Council’s congregations and the

church occupations in the late 1960s can be seen as a combination of attempted dialogue, repression, and struggle.

This examination of the occupation, contestation, and refashioning of sacred spaces by lay Catholics complicates the narrative that the events of the long 1960s finalized a lengthy process of secularization in the modern world. Occupations of, and protests within, churches served as physical and symbolic acts that blurred the boundary between religion and politics. Catholics involved in these actions were driven by their religious beliefs and emphasized their faith, thus incorporating politics within their religious worldview. This dissertation suggests that scholars should embrace a more inclusive conception of the role of religion in contemporary society, one that looks beyond traditional markers of religious activity and traces the diffusion and social significance of religious principles in unconventional settings and among diverse communities.

Introduction

In October 1968, a group of young Catholics in Padova, a city in northern Italy's Veneto region, protested the preparations for an extravagant wedding that meant the local "church was literally occupied by decorators, musicians, electricians, florists" for three days. The Catholics complained to the parish priest that the faithful were unable to pray at the high altar or participate in other religious acts. When the group stood outside the church on the wedding day holding signs that publicized their complaints, they were confronted by plainclothes police officers.¹ In December 1968 in the towns of Avellino and Sant'Agata dei Goti in southern Italy and in the city of Florence in Tuscany, outdoor church nativity scenes were augmented with posters bearing messages depicting how the realities of everyday life conflict with the message of the Church. Criticisms of these protests of "sacred art" by residents of the towns focused on how the individuals responsible for the posters were propagating "class warfare" and blurring the "sacred and profane."² In March 1969, a group of young Catholics protested against the installation of a new bishop in the Veneto town of Adria by "staging a demonstration" in front of the town's cathedral. The group distributed copies of a text in which they declared the event "a squalid and anachronistic ceremony worthy of the Middle Ages." The elaborate pomp and the presence of numerous military and political officials, including Prime Minister Mariano Rumor, served, for these young Catholics, to "highlight the collusion existing between political, military, and

¹ "Lettere al direttore," *Settegiorni*, October 5, 1968.

² Carlo Falconi, *La Contestazione nella Chiesa: Storia e documenti del movimento cattolico antiautoritario in Italia e nel mondo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1969), 308-309 and 315.

clerical powers, behind and against the so-called people of God.”³ A few weeks later on Easter weekend, a young man circulated manifestos of the movement “Vangelo e Rivoluzione” (“Gospel and Revolution”) to parishioners arriving for the midnight Mass in Capannori, a small town to the northeast of Lucca in Tuscany. The manifestos criticized the Church’s alliance with wealthy and powerful forces within Italian society.⁴

The act of protesting outside of, and even occupying, a church by the faithful has a long historical tradition. During the French Revolution, Catholics resisted the shuttering of local churches by seizing keys or removing locked doors in order to claim ownership via public worship and ritual performances.⁵ At other times, priests and lay Catholics have inhabited churches to contest the practices or behavior of their superiors.⁶ In recent years, Catholics have fought against parish closures by maintaining a physical and religious presence in religious buildings, some for lengthy periods of time.⁷

With protests in, and occupations of, churches throughout Italy during the late 1960s, lay Catholics’ challenge of the meaning of sacred spaces was not focused solely on resisting the closure of their houses of worship or protesting issues of religious practice. Rather, their actions

³ “Contestano il vescovo davanti alla cattedrale,” *La Nazione*, March 17, 1969. *La Nazione* noted that the leaflet was signed by the Republican Youth Federation, the Communist Youth Federation, and “some young democrats of the left.” Before the ceremony of installation began, the police dispersed the protestors, who, according to the paper, had failed in their mission as everyone in the diocese of Adria had demonstrated “to their new pastor a great tribute of affection and esteem.”

⁴ “Giovane contesta la messa di Pasqua,” *La Nazione*, April 9, 1969. According to *La Nazione*, “the youth did not find a following and the priest invited him to go away; the protest, written and not shouted, finished there.” Later, the youth reportedly returned to the church, confessed to, and received communion. During the same weekend, two “young students” distributed the same pamphlets of “Vangelo e Rivoluzione” to those entering the parish church of Ruggi in Porcari in Lucca. Upon being warned to stop and disperse by police officers, who had been notified by the parish priest, the students obeyed. According to *La Nazione*’s description of the incident, “nothing happened... It remained an act of religious dispute made graciously and in silence” (“Contestata la Messa della notte di Pasqua,” *La Nazione*, April 8, 1969).

⁵ Suzanne Desan, *Reclaiming the Sacred: Lay Religion and Popular Politics in Revolutionary France*. (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 97.

⁶ “Crowley’s Friends Break into Church,” *Chicago Daily News*, August 2, 1901.

⁷ See John C. Seitz, *No Closure: Catholic Practice and Boston’s Parish Shutdowns* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

used and refashioned the symbolic sacred space of churches to demonstrate the interconnected relationship of the religious, political, cultural, and social spheres of life. By assembling in plain parish churches and grand urban cathedrals, Catholics projected their visions of a Church open to dialogue and devoted to the poor, especially when their actions resulted in highly public struggles with religious officials.

Catholics in Italy were not alone in protesting outside of, or occupying, churches and other sacred spaces in the late 1960s. In Chile, the United States, Portugal, Spain, France, and elsewhere, lay Catholics and some members of the clergy and religious orders engaged in actions within churches to demand more accountability from religious and political leaders and to call for a Church dedicated to following the example of Christ by helping those most in need. Media coverage of these protests and occupations quickly spread throughout the Catholic world, influencing and inspiring other Catholics to act in their towns and cities. Thus, while the story that follows is, in many ways, uniquely Italian, it is also a common global tale.

This dissertation argues that Catholic churches were spaces of religious innovation and experimentation, social struggle, and political protests in the 1950s and 1960s. In many parishes throughout the Catholic world, these actions led to conflicts with local ecclesiastical officials over who had the authority to claim the sacred space of churches and define what could happen, and who could gather, within their walls. These disputes were more than just a local issue. Rather, they embodied the broader debates and challenges roiling the Catholic Church in the post-Vatican II years and served as a proxy for a fierce clash between competing visions about the identity and mission of the Church.

In their emphasis on the central role of the “people of God” in the global Church, Catholics assembling within or occupying churches and cathedrals in the late 1960s were

continuing the study of the Gospels and their religious experimentations that began in the years before the Second Vatican Council. Up until recently, the overwhelming majority of the tens of thousands of books and articles written about Vatican II tended to portray the Council as if it, and the thousands of Church officials who participated in it, initiated the changes that altered the Catholic Church in the decades since the 1960s. Yet, in recent years, some scholars have begun to pay particular attention to the 1940s and 1950s as a crucial era during which Catholics around the world started to transform their everyday practices at the local level.⁸ As a result of this growing body of research, a new image of the Council, as a reactionary effort by Church officials to stay ahead of religious and social change driven by innovations undertaken in parishes around the world, is coming into focus. Indeed, as this dissertation argues, many of the concepts and reforms “introduced” by the Council had already been implemented and practiced for years by Catholics in parishes throughout Italy.

Between 1962 and 1965, nearly three thousand bishops and hundreds of theological advisors and Catholic and non-Catholic observers gathered in St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome during four sessions of the Second Vatican Council.⁹ Throughout the 168 general assemblies of Vatican II, the Council hall became a space of religious, social, intellectual, and political activity unparalleled in the history of the Church. Many accounts of the Council, both those printed at the time and memoirs published later, highlighted the tense atmosphere that marked many meetings

⁸ John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Timothy Kelly, *The Transformation of American Catholicism: The Pittsburgh Laity and the Second Vatican Council, 1950-1972* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009); Jeremy Bonner, Christopher D. Denny, and Mary Beth Fraser Connolly, eds., *Empowering the People of God: Catholic Action Before and After Vatican II* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

⁹ For a comprehensive look at the experiences of the non-Catholic advisors during the Council, see Mauro Velati, *Separati ma Fratelli: Gli osservatori non cattolici al Vaticano II (1962-1965)* (Bologna: Società Editrice il Mulino, 2014).

and the heated debates among various factions of Council fathers.¹⁰ In the scholarship on Vatican II written since the Council's conclusion, these fierce battles have been largely overshadowed by the theological, political, and intellectual disputes waged over the Council's legacy.¹¹

Yet conflicts among members of the Church hierarchy were fundamental to the experience, course, and later interpretations of the Council. At the heart of these clashes was a struggle for administrative and physical control over the sacred space of the Council hall in St. Peter's Basilica, one of, if not the most, sacred building in the Catholic Church. While this dissertation focuses on the activity that occurred within St. Peter's, it is important to note that these meetings were just one aspect of the many crucial interactions of individuals during the Council. Giuseppe Alberigo, the preeminent historian of Vatican II, has argued that it was "the spontaneous creation of meeting points, such as the informal discussions held during long bus trips, which fostered the exchange of opinions" among Council fathers, experts, non-Catholics, the laity, and the press.¹² In addition to these captive moments during transportation, important activity occurred at the afternoon sessions of various commissions charged with debating and

¹⁰ In this dissertation's second chapter, I rely heavily on journals written by Council fathers, *periti* (Catholic theologians who accompanied bishops and provided them with advice throughout the Council), invited Catholic and non-Catholic observers, and other commentators. For a detailed listing of the primary sources and archival collections related to the Council, see *Il Concilio Inedito: Fonti del Vaticano II* (Bologna: Società Editrice Il Mulino, 2001).

¹¹ For example, see: Massimo Faggioli, *A Council for the Global Church: Receiving Vatican II in History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015); Lieven Boeve, Mathijs Lamberigts, and Terrence Merrigan, eds., *The Contested Legacy of Vatican II: Lessons and Prospects* (Leuven: Peeters, 2015); Shaji George Kochuthara, CMI, ed., *Revisiting Vatican II: 50 Years of Renewal*, vol. 1 (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2014); Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (New York: Paulist Press, 2012); John W. O'Malley S.J., "The Hermeneutic of Reform: A Historical Analysis," *Theological Studies* 73, no. 3 (2012): 517-546; John W. O'Malley, et al., *Vatican II: Did Anything Happen*, ed. David G. Schultenover (New York: Continuum, 2007); Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004); Giuseppe Alberigo, Jean-Pierre Jossua, and Joseph A. Komonchak, eds., *The Reception of Vatican II* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987). Some leading examples of a more traditionalist and critical approach to the Council's legacy include: Roberto de Mattei, *Il Concilio Vaticano II: Una storia mai scritta* (Turin: Lindau, 2011); Bruno Gherardini, *The Ecumenical Vatican Council II: A Much Needed Discussion* (Frigento: Casa Mariana Editrice, 2009); Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering, eds., *Vatican II: Renewal Within Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Agostino Marchetto, *Il Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II: Contrapunto per la sua storia* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005).

¹² Giuseppe Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II*, trans. Mathew Sherry (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006), 17.

drafting schemata, the regular gatherings of informal groups dedicated to discussing and exploring upcoming themes, the speeches and conferences held by theological experts and Council fathers, and during moments of rest and relaxation at various restaurants, hotels, and religious houses throughout Rome.

While Council fathers and others gathered in St. Peter's Basilica, Catholics throughout Italy and the rest of the world were closely following the discussions, contestations, and incidents occurring in Rome. During the Vatican II years, lay Catholics and members of the clergy engaged in conversations and studies of various aspects of the Council, especially its constitutions, declarations, and decrees. In some communities, laypeople and the clergy experienced the proposals and spirit of the Council in diverse ways, leading to fierce clashes over what it meant to be Catholic at all levels of the Church. Catholics continued to explore their expanding understandings of Catholicism and search for their place in a Church growing increasingly more diverse in the post-Vatican II years.

By embracing the identity of the "people of God," Catholics protesting within and occupying churches and cathedrals in the late 1960s were incorporating their lived experiences of, and further developing concepts that arose from, the Second Vatican Council. One of the most influential of the Council's sixteen documents was *Lumen Gentium* ("The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church"), which, in part, outlined the duties and functions of an engaged "people of God" within the Church. For those Catholics who occupied cathedrals and protested Church policies in the late 1960s, the embodied concepts of Vatican II served as a powerful endorsement for a horizontally-structured and more inclusive Church. In addition, the symbolic importance of the Council's physical and spatial manifestations also validated the political, religious, and social activity of lay Catholics in the late 1960s.

In the extensive historiography of what is now called the “global 1968,” the critical contributions made by Catholics as part of the movements and events that shaped the late 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s have been largely overlooked. Instead, most scholars of this time period have focused on the activism of students and workers and prioritize generational, racial, gender, cultural, ideological, colonial, and economic conflicts. When the Catholic Church is included in these studies, it is often portrayed as a conservative force that sought to ensure the continuation of the established political, religious, and social order and thwart the aims of leftist students and workers.¹³ For example, after briefly highlighting the impact of the worker-priest movement in France and Italy and the election of John XXIII on the shifting culture of the 1960s, Arthur

¹³ For instance, see Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, c. 1958-c. 1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); David Caute, *The Year of the Barricades: A Journey through 1968* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Lewis S. Feuer, *The Conflict of Generations: The Character and Significance of Student Movements* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1969); Ronald Fraser, ed., *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1988); Cyril Levitt, *Children of Privilege: Student Revolt in the Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984); Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, and Detlef Junker, eds., *1968: The World Transformed* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth, eds., *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956-1977* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Aldo Agosti, Luisa Passerini, Nicola Tranfaglia, eds., *La cultura e i luoghi del '68* (Turin: Franco Agnelli, 1991); Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Martin Klimke, Jacco Pekelder, and Joachim Scharloth, eds., *Between Prague Spring and French May: Opposition and Revolt in Europe, 1960-1980* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011); Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of the Détente* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Belinda Davis, Wilfried Mausbach, Martin Klimke, and Carla MacDougall, eds., *Changing the World, Changing Oneself: Political Protest and Collective Identities in West Germany and the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s* (New York: Berghahn, 2010); Alessandro Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997); Kevin B. Witherspoon, *Before the Eyes of the World: Mexico and the 1968 Olympic Games* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008); Elaine Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power, and Terror in 1968 Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005); Pedro A. G. Monaville, “Decolonizing the University: Postal Politics, The Student Movement, and Global 1968 in the Congo,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Michigan, 2013); Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002); Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); Samantha Christiansen and Zachary A. Scarlett, *The Third World in the Global 1960s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013); David Farber, *Chicago '68* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988); Lessie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen, eds., *Gender and Sexuality in 1968: Transformative Politics in the Cultural Imagination* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

Marwick nonetheless writes that the “Catholic Church tended to operate as a centre of opposition to all the great movements aiming towards greater freedom for ordinary human beings.”¹⁴

A much smaller, but growing body of research conducted primarily by scholars of religion, has viewed Catholicism, individual Catholics, and even the Church as legitimate and useful subjects of analysis for understanding the culture, events, and implications of 1968 and the long Sixties.¹⁵ These studies have highlighted the influence of lay Catholics and clergy as proponents for civil rights in America, as opponents of war in Southeast Asia, and as innovators of new types of communities and social movements in Latin American and Western Europe. Yet even within this literature, the importance of churches (or cathedrals) as spaces of protest remain overlooked, effectively hidden in the long shadows cast by universities and factories as the main sites of protest during this tumultuous period.

In *Europe's 1968*, an entire chapter is devoted to examining the places within which activists protested and the spaces they sought to occupy. Yet, once again, primacy is given to the universities, factories, and public squares of Western and Eastern Europe. When several new forms of radical spaces are discussed, a chapel in Hungary is included. However, this chapel, which had been abandoned for some time, was leased by a local artist as a venue for alternative art exhibitions.¹⁶

¹⁴ Marwick, *The Sixties*, 34.

¹⁵ See Mark S. Massa, S.J., *The American Catholic Revolution: How the Sixties Changed the Church Forever* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); John Seidler and Katherine Meyer, *Conflict and Change in the Catholic Church* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Daniela Saresella, *Dal Concilio alla contestazione: Riviste cattoliche negli anni del cambiamento (1958-1968)* (Brescia: Editrice Morcelliana, 2005); Peter Mitchell, *Coup at Catholic University: The 1968 Revolution in American Catholic Education* (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 2015); Alessandro Chini, *Il dissenso cattolico. Dal postconcilio al referendum sul divorzio in Italia e Trento* (Trento: Edizioni V.C.T., 2009); Mario Cuminetti, *Il dissenso cattolico in Italia, 1965-1980* (Milan: Biblioteca universal Rizzoli, 1983); Shawn Francis Peters, *The Catonsville Nine: A Story of Faith and Resistance in the Vietnam Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁶ Rebecca Clifford, Juliane Fürst, Robert Gildea, James Mark, Piotr Oseka, and Chris Reynolds, “Spaces,” in *Europe's 1968: Voices of Revolt*, eds., Robert Gildea, James Mark, and Annette Warring (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 164-192.

This literature also continues to diminish the importance of individual Catholics as agents of change and religion as a motivating factor for action. Instead, students and workers driven by political and economic desires continue to star as the main protagonists. Two particular studies are worth examining. Also in *Europe's 1968*, an entire chapter, titled "Faith," focuses on "the nature and extent of religious radicalism around 1968." While the authors of this chapter analyze Catholics who protested in, or occupied, churches, and even briefly touch on the events in Isolotto discussed later in this dissertation, they nonetheless repeatedly refer to the Catholics and their activism as "radical," "militant," and "left-wing."¹⁷ Thus, in this study, the authors' use of labels that align with how secular activists are described lessens the importance of religion.

In Gerd-Rainer Horn's recent and ambitious examination of Catholic activism in Europe in the late 1960s, *The Spirit of Vatican II*, three of the five chapters are devoted, broadly, to the initiatives of students and workers and the attempts of certain Catholics, such as worker priests, to evangelize to these populations within spaces such as factories. When Horn does address the occupation of the cathedrals in Trent and Parma (events discussed later in this dissertation), he prioritizes the context of radical student activism over that of Catholic dissent. Horn describes those who protested within and occupied the cathedrals as "students," "activists," "dissidents," and "protestors." Not once does Horn describe these individuals as Catholics. Thus, even within his fantastic examination of Catholic protests, Horn's choice of labels powerfully reaffirms the primacy of the individuals' student identity over that of their religious identity.¹⁸

Opposed to the arguments made by historians such as Gerd-Rainer Horn, this dissertation contends that the multifaceted agendas of Catholics protesting within, and occupying, churches in the late 1960s were a potent symbol of the pervasive resonance of religion in a world

¹⁷ Péter Apor, Rebecca Clifford, and Nigel Townson, "Faith," in *Europe's 1968*, 211-238.

¹⁸ Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of Vatican II*, 205-208.

experiencing dramatic change. Catholics' deep attachment to specific sacred spaces has traditionally been viewed as a legacy of an earlier, pre-modern era. Yet Italian Catholics did not occupy churches and cathedrals because they represented holy havens providing shelter from dynamic social, cultural, and political forces that threatened a simpler way of life. Rather, they chose these sacred spaces for the freedom they offered to remake the feelings and values of their Catholicism. Local parish churches and urban cathedrals offered more than a mere connection to the past for Catholics taking action during the 1950s and 1960s. They were a space in which to construct a path to the future by transforming the buildings through their presence and the incorporation of innovative religious practices.

Catholics assembling within, or occupying, churches and cathedrals consecrated these spaces via their embodied practices and rituals, such as the celebration of Mass or the reading of God's word. Engagement with their surroundings enabled Catholics to claim both physical and symbolic ownership of not only particular sacred spaces but also the universal Church. This sense of ownership resulted in a transformed approach to their physical surroundings. During protests and occupations, the space of the church or cathedral was no longer simply a place of order to be venerated in isolation or quiet communion with other members of the faithful. Instead, to paraphrase David Sopher, a crucial significance of the space was its social character.¹⁹ Thus, the sacredness of the cathedrals was not only grounded in a "real" manifestation attached to the physical place, but was also the result of individual and social practices that drew Catholics, and in some cases non-believers, together for worship and discussion of the ills of the Church and society, practices and actions that sacralized the churches and cathedrals.²⁰

¹⁹ David Sopher, "The Landscape of Home," in D.W. Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 138.

²⁰ With this approach, the assembling in, and occupation of, churches and cathedrals draws on both the substantial and situational definitions of the sacred and sacred space. The substantial definition depicts the sacred as something

While the spaces examined in this dissertation are found within Italy, this study of parish churches, cathedrals and basilicas, and individual communities has global implications for our understanding of the Catholic Church as well as how we view the tumultuous decades of the 1950s and 1960s. Yet, the uniquely Italian characteristics of these spaces are crucial to understanding this story. To comprehend the specifically Italian attributes of these spaces, it is important to review the significant economic, social, political, and cultural transformations occurring in Italy in the postwar years.

At the end of the Second World War, Italian society lay in ruin. As a result of aerial bombardments and the conflict's devastating battles, thousands of classrooms, hospitals, communication facilities, streets, bridges, banks, churches, and other components of the nation's infrastructure had been damaged or destroyed.²¹ Millions of Italians were homeless and underpaid or unemployed. Hunger was a constant presence in the daily lives of many Italians as

powerful, magnificent, and real. According to this viewpoint, the sacred only appears or can be found in certain spaces. Thus, these sacred sites become centers of ritualistic practices that give meaning to life. The substantial viewpoint is best exemplified by the works of Gerardus van der Leeuw and Mircea Eliade. The situational definition argues that nothing is innately sacred and that the sacred is created through human interactions that sacralize places, people, and relationships. Proponents of the situational definition, such as Emile Durkheim, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Jonathan Z. Smith, contend that it is actually the ritual practices and human endeavors taking place within spaces that proved them with a sacred character. For a study that analyzes the ideas of Van der Leeuw and Eliade, see Larry E. Shiner, "Sacred Space, Profane Space, Human Space," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 40 (1972), 425-436. For works on the substantial definition, see: Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J. E. Turner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986); Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Harper and Row, 1958); Mircea Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1961). For works articulating a situational approach to the sacred and sacred space, see: Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). For other important works on sacred space, see: Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977); Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (New York: Orion Press, 1964); Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1994); Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).

²¹ Fondazione Giorgio La Pira, *Caro Giorgio... Caro Amintore...: 25 anni di storia nel carteggio La Pira-Fanfani* (Florence: Edizioni Polistampa, 2003), 60. For instance, in 1945, compared to capacity levels of 1938, the agricultural sector was at sixty-three percent, only eight percent of the mercantile fleet and fifty percent of steam and electric trains were operable, sixty-two percent of hydroelectric plants were running, and ten percent of the nation's docks were usable. (Paolo Nicoloso, "Gli architetti: il rilancio di una professione," in *La grande ricostruzione: Il piano Ina-Casa e l'Italia degli anni cinquanta*, ed. Paola Di Biagi (Roma: Donzelli Editore, 2001), 83).

large swaths of agricultural land, including millions of fruit trees, olive trees, and vines, lay devastated or underutilized. In industrial cities and rural towns, nearly seven million rooms, approximately one-fifth of the country's total, were uninhabitable or reduced to rubble.²² In the years after the war, nearly two million Italians remained unemployed, while those fortunate enough to find work faced skyrocketing inflation.²³ By the early 1950s, one quarter of all Italians lived in poverty and roughly three million families lived in overcrowded housing. A third of those living in overcrowded housing shared rooms with at least four people or occupied non-traditional forms of housing, such as cellars, attics, barracks, and caves. While overcrowded housing and housing shortages were national problems, it was significantly worse in southern Italy, where more than twenty percent of the population lived in overcrowded apartments.²⁴ Throughout the country, only eight percent of Italian residences included electricity, indoor plumbing, and potable drinking water.²⁵

In Italy, as in Britain, West Germany, France, and other European states engaged in reconstruction efforts, politicians viewed the rapid construction of housing as an effective tool with which to repair the country's severe housing shortage and crippling unemployment crisis. Unlike their European counterparts, however, Italian officials relied heavily on private initiatives, which resulted in few efforts to "safeguard the needs of the poorest sections of the community by the creation of a public or council housing sector."²⁶ The reliance of Italian

²² Giorgio Vecchio, "L'età di De Gasperi (1945-1953)" in *Storia dell'Italia Contemporanea: Dalla crisi del fascismo alla crisi della repubblica (1939-1998)*, ed. Giorgio Vecchio (Bologna: Monduzzi Editore, 1999), 166-167.

²³ Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy*, 80.

²⁴ Paolo Braghin, ed., *Inchiesta sulla miseria in Italia, 1951-1952* (Turin: Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi, 1978), xv and 14. An apartment that was occupied by a ratio of more than two people per room was considered to be severely overcrowded. For more information on housing density, see Luigi Beretta Anguissola, *I 14 anni del piano Ina-Casa* (Roma: Staderini, 1963), 7-8.

²⁵ Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy*, 210.

²⁶ Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy*, 246-247. Ginsborg notes that between 1948 and 1963, sixteen percent of the total investment in construction efforts derived from public housing programs. For more on the different rates of public

officials on private financing and building speculation resulted in the speedy construction of homes in the 1950s and 1960s. Unfortunately for the residents of these homes, many lacked proper facilities and were often built in violation of safety codes. Lack of government financing, and thus oversight, also contributed to what historian Paul Ginsborg has deemed “a catastrophic change in the landscape and cityscape of the Italian peninsula,” as building contractors were not required to follow urban or town development plans, permanently changing the character of cities’ historical centers and contributing to urban sprawl.²⁷

The most significant housing initiative undertaken by the Italian government in the postwar era was the Ina-Casa plan, which was instituted with the passage of the Fanfani law on February 28, 1949.²⁸ Named after its author, Minister of Labor and Social Security Amintore Fanfani, the Ina-Casa plan sought to construct working-class housing for those whose labor would play an important role in modernizing and transforming Italy from an agricultural society into an industrial power fueled by individual consumption.²⁹ Italian governmental officials hoped the Ina-Casa plan would also serve as an economic stimulus for the construction industry by providing funds for hundreds of thousands of skilled and unskilled laborers who would build the

vs. private initiatives in Italy, France, and West Germany, see Costanza Caniglia Rispoli and Amalia Signorelli, “L’esperienza del piano Ina-Casa: tra antropologia e urbanistica,” in *La grande ricostruzione*, 187.

²⁷ Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy*, 246.

²⁸ The law’s official title was *Provvedimenti per incrementare l’occupazione operaia agevolando la costruzione di case per i lavoratori*. INA stands for *Istituto Nazionale Assicurazione*, the national insurance agency responsible for financing the plan.

²⁹ The Ina-Casa plan was not the first publicly funded housing program in Italy. Local housing cooperatives and the *Istituto per le Case Popolari* (ICP), later renamed the *Istituto Autonomo per le Case Popolari* (IACP), provided for the construction of residences at the urban and regional levels. During the 1920s and 1930s, the shortage of housing plagued fascist leadership. In Milan, for example, 260,000 residents lived in overcrowded housing, while thousands more occupied whatever shelter they could find, including “cellars, stables, and garrets” in the suburbs. The Fascist regime responded by constructing working-class housing through the *Istituto Fascista per le Case Popolari* (IFCP). While the Ina-Casa plan addressed housing needs for members of the working class in postwar Italy, federal employees could seek housing built by the *Istituto nazionale per le case degli impiegati dello Stato* (INCIS) and agricultural laborers received assistance with new shelters through the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency-CASAS (UNRRA-CASAS) (Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy*, 19 and Stephanie Z. Pilat, “Reconstructing Italy: The Ina-Casa neighborhoods of the Postwar Era,” (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2009), 29). For more information on the history of government housing for working-class Italians, see Lando Bortolotti, *Storia della politica edilizia in Italia* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1978); Anna R. Minelli, *La politica per la casa* (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 2004).

desperately needed housing. During the fourteen years of its operation (1949-1963), the construction of approximately 350,000 apartments represented the “phase of maximum government intervention in the housing sector” after the Second World War.³⁰

Three of the five chapters in this dissertation focus on the Ina-Casa community of Isolotto, built on the outskirts of Florence in the early 1950s. On April 18, 1951, the Florentine City Council approved a plan to construct Isolotto southwest of the historical center and across the Arno River from the Parco delle Cascine, the one-time hunting reserve of the Medici family that now served as the city’s largest park.³¹ Several key factors influenced where Isolotto was to be built. Throughout the fourteen-year existence of Ina-Casa, administrators routinely selected areas on the periphery of populated cities and industrial centers as sites for their developments.³² This was not a new phenomenon in Italy. Working-class neighborhoods had been on the periphery of urban areas since the beginning of the twentieth century when rural individuals and

³⁰ A. Acocella, *L’edilizia residenziale pubblica in Italia dal 1945 ad oggi*, (Padova: Cedeva, 1980), 34. During the plan’s first seven-year stage (*settennio*) from 1949-1956, 147,000 apartments were constructed, with 735,000 rooms. During the second *settennio* (1956-1963), 200,000 apartments were built, including 1,000,000 rooms (Vecchio, *Storia dell’Italia Contemporanea*, 253-254). In 1963, officials replaced the Ina-Casa plan with the *Gestione Case Lavoratori* (GESCAL). While significant, this number corresponds to only nine percent of the total residential units built in Italy during this period. Regionally, the percentage of apartments constructed by Ina-Casa was slightly higher in southern Italy and the Islands (nearly twelve percent) than in north and central Italy (eight percent). This was due in part to Article ten of the Fanfani plan, which dictated that at least one-third of all residences was to be built in southern Italy and the islands in an attempt to rectify the social and economic inequity that existed between Italian geographical regions. The percentage in Tuscany was slightly above the national average, where roughly nine-and-a-half percent of units constructed were financed by Ina-Casa (Corrado Beguinot, “La ricostruzione e il Piano Ina-Casa,” in *Fanfani e la casa: Gli anni Cinquanta e il modello italiano di welfare state: Il piano INA-Casa* (Rome: Rubbettino Editore, 2002), 187).

³¹ Poli, *Storie di Quartiere*, 69. At the same April session in 1951, the city council approved the study of a more extensive plan for the urban development of Florence, which had been requested in 1949. This plan outlined three areas for expansion, one of which would become the community of Isolotto. Designers imagined that this area could be the future home of 35,000 people who lived in five self-sufficient communities. Two other Ina-Casa projects would be completed in Tuscany in the following decades. Planning for the quarter of San Giusto in Prato (approximately fifteen kilometers northwest of Florence) began in 1957, and construction of the community of Belvedere in Pistoia, further to the northwest of Florence, began in 1960. For more information on the Ina-Casa projects in Prato and Pistoia, see Franco Nuti, ed., *Tre quartieri INA-Casa in Toscana* (Florence: Edizioni Polistampa, 2004).

³² Examples of these development areas include Cesate in Milan, Falchero in Turin, Pitrè in Palermo, San Paolo in Rome, Panigale in Bologna, and Mestre in Venice.

families migrated to cities looking for work.³³ As Stephanie Pilat notes in her study of the Ina-Casa program's importance for the physical, social, and civic reconstruction of Italy, the location of these neighborhoods on the margins of cities illustrates how "the working-class was being made physically invisible in the metropolis."³⁴

A second consideration related to the location of Ina-Casa communities was the cost of land. In most cases, land on the edges of cities such as Rome, Milan, and Florence was relatively inexpensive, especially when compared to the exorbitant cost of space in the crowded, ancient centers of these cities. In Florence, much of the land that would become the community of Isolotto was considered to be "alluvial soil of little agricultural value" and had already been purchased by the city administration.³⁵ Many governmental officials, architects, and urban planners in postwar Italy also targeted land on the edges of major urban centers for expansion zones because "non-urbanized territories were read as 'blank pages,' without identity." Urban planners and their development projects frequently ignored pre-existing material and social aspects of rural culture and communities, including "buildings, organizations of open land, canal networks, minor roads, embankments, etc."³⁶

³³ Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy*, 18-19. Ginsborg argues the lack of social mobility and the physical layout of working-class apartment blocks in Turin created an environment in which "a strong sense of community flourished." While Fascism challenged the social cohesiveness among the working-class, the location of working-class residences did not change. In Milan in the early 1930s, as homes in the city center were destroyed for governmental buildings and expensive new housing, thousands of individuals moved into "cellars, stables, and garrets" in the expanding suburbs.

³⁴ Pilat, "Reconstructing Italy," 6. This practice of the Ina-Casa program was a continuation of urban development strategies within most continental European cities, unlike in Britain and the United States where those who lived on the edges of cities tended to be the wealthiest (94).

³⁵ Bazzocchi, *L'architettura Ina Casa*, 107. Isolotto covered thirty-four hectares, which is the equivalent of 340,000 square meters (or approximately 84 acres). With the purchase, forty-seven proprietors of orchards were forced to sell their land. The value alone of the hanging fruit that was covered in the sale price was approximately 18 million lira. Overall, the cost of construction of Isolotto would total 3.5 billion lira, with 2.5 billion delegated for the construction of the buildings and the other billion for the streets, water and sewage systems, public lighting, and other services ("A Firenze una realizzazione senza precedente: Che cosa sia la 'architettura sociale' lo dice il nuovo villaggio dell'Isolotto," *Giornale del Mattino*, November 2, 1954).

³⁶ Poli, *Storie di Quartiere*, 77.

The land that would be transformed into the community of Isolotto in the early 1950s had historically been viewed by most Florentines with a “sense of contempt and arrogance.” It was in the “Oltrarno,” on the south, or wrong, side of the river, separated from the majestic cathedrals, grand piazzas, and priceless works of art kept in the historic center. It was a dumping ground for those who lived in the celebrated city upriver. It had been the site where Florentines disposed of their trash, rendered the bones and carcasses of dead animals, and housed individuals with contagious diseases.³⁷

On November 6, 1954, Florentine Mayor Giorgio La Pira, along with Cardinal Archbishop Elia Dalla Costa, the chief of police, rector of the university, and over a dozen other local, regional, and national officials, presided over the inauguration of the new satellite city of Isolotto. In his speech to the assembled crowd of new residents and onlookers, La Pira declared that Isolotto was not simply a collection of buildings and shops, but rather “an organic unit that gives to its present and future members—as the house does for present and future members of the family—all the essential elements for the serene development of their life.”³⁸ La Pira concluded his speech by urging the new residents, especially the youth of the community, “those richest in talent and ideals,” to create “a center of civilization: a place in service of the most high ideals of man—ideals of sainthood, of work, of art, of poetry” that would reflect the “sublime greatness of Christian civilization” of their mother city, Florence.³⁹

The first chapter of this dissertation focuses on the first eight years of the community of Isolotto’s existence, from the end of 1954 to the beginning of 1963. In particular, it examines how Enzo Mazzi, the young and energetic priest assigned to the parish in 1954 sought to radically reimagine both the space of the community and the parish church once it was

³⁷ Poli, *Storie di Quartiere*, 17.

³⁸ Giorgio La Pira, *Non Case, Ma Città: Isolotto, Città Satellite di Firenze* (Firenze: Il Comune di Firenze, 1954), 5.

³⁹ La Pira, *Non Case, Ma Città*, 13.

constructed in 1957. Mazzi's efforts to meet the everyday social and physical needs of residents through spiritual endeavors marked by a politics of inclusion resulted in the establishment of the sacred space of the parish church as not just the religious heart of the parish, but also the social center of Isolotto. During this period in Isolotto's history, lay Catholics worked in tandem with Mazzi to construct their parish through their experiences, interactions with each other, and religious innovations. They used this opportunity to rethink what it meant to be a Catholic in a dynamic moment within the history of the Church and to create a new system of relationships between the laity and the clergy, a structure they hoped would spread to other parishes and religious communities in the Catholic world. In this fertile moment of experimentation and inclusion, Catholics in Isolotto implemented religious practices that allowed them to better follow Christ's example, which involved actively engaging in social and political issues to aid those most in need. These practices anticipated the changes that would be sanctioned by the Second Vatican Council in the early 1960s.

In the second chapter, this dissertation shifts its focus from the parish church in Isolotto on the outskirts of Florence to perhaps the most sacred space in the Catholic Church: St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. It analyzes the conflicts among participants (cardinals, bishops, cardinals, and theological experts) in the Council Hall during the four sessions of Vatican II between 1962 and 1965. By doing so, the chapter corrects a historiographical gap and posits that these clashes were fundamental to the experience, course, and later interpretations of the Second Vatican Council. Furthermore, by examining the ways in which some Council participants sought to create a physical and ideological space for dialogue on global issues facing the Church and its approach to the modern world, this chapter argues that these actions provided a template and inspiration for lay Catholics who protested within, and occupied, churches in the late 1960s.

This dissertation's third chapter returns to Isolotto and Florence and analyzes how different groups of Catholics in the archdiocese of Florence experienced the Council. Throughout the city, Catholics engaged in reflection, discussion, and examinations of the key moments and ideas emerging from the Council's sessions in Rome. For Catholics in Isolotto, this process of self-discovery had begun before the commencement of Vatican II as the parish was being created from the ground up. During the years of the Council, the faithful in Isolotto continued to experiment with religious practices and engage in protests of social, political, and economic injustices around the world. These actions against the status quo in all societal realms were not detached from the ongoing expansion of the Catholics' understanding of Catholicism and the Church. Rather, for the faithful of Isolotto, their efforts to democratize the Church and refocus the institution's mission served as the foundation for their struggles to create an open and loving global society.

Chapter four of the dissertation moves to the sacred space of Parma's cathedral, which was occupied by a group of young Catholics in September of 1968. The chapter examines how different populations within the Church, and Italy more broadly, viewed both the act of occupation and the motivations of the occupiers. During the occupation of the Parma Cathedral, and in other occupations of churches around Italy, Catholics discussed and publicized issues that addressed religious, political, and social concerns on local, national, and global scales. In many incidents, Catholics defended their actions by claiming they were part of the "people of God" and thus had full rights within the sacred space of churches, cathedrals, and the universal institution of the Church. Yet, by embracing the identity as the "people of God," Catholics occupying churches and cathedrals were also repudiating the power of these sacred spaces. If the Church was the "people of God," then control over who meets within specific sacred spaces no

longer mattered. This depiction of the Church as a communal body instead of a hierarchical and institutional body is one reason why occupations were met with such fierce condemnations. Finally, this chapter considers how societal perceptions of the student movement and the occupation of universities influenced the reception of the ideas put forth by Catholics who occupied churches. While Italian students and Catholics involved in the occupations of universities and churches shared a similar perspective towards the symbolic importance of space, student and Catholic protestors often approached and behaved within occupied spaces in diverse ways.

This dissertation's fifth and final chapter returns once more to Isolotto. It depicts the fierce clash that occurred between the faithful of the community and the archdiocese in 1968 and 1969, which ultimately ended with ecclesiastical officials closing the church for eight months. Just as the Catholics in Isolotto had been engaged in innovative religious practices long before the opening of the Council in 1962 and during the Council's four sessions, they continued to explore what it meant to be Catholic in a new, post-Vatican II Church in the late 1960s. As it had been since its construction in 1957, Isolotto's church remained the social and sacred core of the community during the last few months of 1968 and the beginning of 1969. Throughout this period, the faithful gathered in the church to pray and to discuss how to articulate their vision for a Church of the Poor. And on multiple occasions, assemblies called to demonstrate solidarity with the community and the ideals it espoused attracted thousands of supporters. As with the conflict in Parma, the events in Florence during this period represented more than just a battle for who had the authority to claim the space of Isolotto's church and define what could happen and who could gather within its walls. This chapter depicts how this dispute, in actuality, served as a proxy for several larger conflicts in the post-Vatican II years over who truly represented the

Church (the faithful as the People of God or the hierarchy), the relationship between priests and bishops, and the proper mission and focus of the Church in a dynamic and changing world. Finally, this chapter, along with the third and fourth chapters, emphasizes the importance of religion and religiosity for understanding the turbulent years of the late 1960s.

While this dissertation begins and ends with a focus on the community of believers in Isolotto, located on the outskirts of Florence and the edges of the Catholic Church, the ramifications of this micro-historical analysis extend beyond the fields of Italian and Catholic history. In regards to the study of the Second Vatican Council, this dissertation adds to our current understanding of how the Council grew out of local efforts to change the Church from below that were happening years and decades before 1962. It also emphasizes the conflicts that occurred during the Council as key for truly understanding not just the experiences of the Council fathers but also the events and clashes in the years following 1965. This dissertation also demonstrates that Catholics, who protested within, and occupied, churches and cathedrals in the late 1960s were primarily driven by their religious beliefs and identified as Catholics, not leftist radicals who also happened to be Catholic. Occupations of small churches and grand cathedrals represented physical and symbolic acts that blurred boundaries between religion and politics and incorporated politics within a religious worldview. Thus, this examination of the occupation, contestation, and refashioning of sacred spaces by lay Catholics throughout the 1950s and 1960s shows how many Catholics' desire to reform the Church was braided together with their aspiration to re-sacralize politics from a progressively Catholic perspective.

Chapter I The Poetics and Politics of Sacred Space in a Florentine Community

1. Introduction

On November 6, 1954, the Archbishop of Florence, Cardinal Elia Dalla Costa, offered a blessing at the inauguration of the city's newest satellite community, Isolotto. Addressing the thousands of new residents and onlookers gathered in the unpaved main piazza, Dalla Costa wished that "the Heaven that is beautiful, serene and provides the works of Christian civilization continue perennially in our city and our Italy." He closed his brief remarks by urging the crowd to not forget the advice found in the world's wisest books, that "peace is the work of justice."¹

Dalla Costa recognized he would need to find an energetic and open-minded priest to shepherd and inspire Isolotto's new residents. Whoever he chose would face significant challenges, as the basic material, social, and spiritual infrastructure required to call Isolotto a vibrant and self-sufficient human community had yet to be completed. Some of the apartment buildings lacked water heaters and glass in the windows, while others still needed to be whitewashed.² The streets, which remained unpaved and lacked a proper drainage system, became muddy swamps after rainstorms. The twenty-two shops originally planned for the community, which had the potential to serve as gathering sites for residents, had not yet opened. Making matters worse for residents forced to travel long distances to purchase basic goods,

¹ Giorgio La Pira, *Non Case, Ma Città: Isolotto, Città Satellite di Firenze* (Firenze: Il Comune di Firenze, 1954): 14.

² "Il Villaggio dell'Isolotto inizia oggi la sua vita," *Il Nuovo Corriere*, November 6, 1954.

public transport connecting the community to the rest of Florence had yet to be established.³

Although construction on the permanent parish church had begun in October 1954, progress was slow.⁴ Until its completion, Isolotto's faithful would be forced to gather in a small, private chapel located on the periphery of the community. And while most of Isolotto's new residents were members of young working-class families, significant economic, social, and political divisions, especially in regards to the "mentality, culture, and also dialects" of some individuals, posed a threat to community-building initiatives.⁵ Isolotto's first priest would have to be willing to embrace and exude a "missionary spirit" in an incomplete and isolated community.⁶

Envisioned and implemented by Christian Democrats, Ina Casa communities like Isolotto were also part of a political agenda as they were frequently built long distances from factories, the main sites of employment for Ina Casa residents and in many cases, spaces where affiliation with Socialism and Communism was strongest.⁷ By spatially isolating residents' from their places of employment, Ina Casa officials hoped to limit class conflict to factories and create communities marked by interclass relations.⁸ For individuals in Isolotto, not only were they trying to become adjusted to the surroundings of a new community, they were also attempting to

³ "Mancano tutti i servizi al villaggio dell'Isolotto," *L'Unità*, November 5, 1954; "Gli effetti dei 'ritardi' dell'amministrazione comunale—Strade di fango all'Isolotto anche nel giorno della inaugurazione," *L'Unità*, November 6, 1954; "Le case ci sono difficile è arrivarci," *Il Nuovo Corriere-La Gazzetta*, November 10, 1954; Daniela Poli, *Storie di Quartiere: La vicenda Ina-Casa nel villaggio Isolotto a Firenze* (Firenze: Edizioni Polistampa, 2004), 97.

⁴ "Duecentocinquanta alloggi consegnati ai senza tetto e ai profughi," *La Nazione*, November 1, 1954; "Consegnati nuovi alloggi all'Isolotto: Altre duecentoquarantotto famiglie hanno da ieri la loro nuova casa," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, July, 25, 1955.

⁵ Christian G. De Vito, *Mondo operaio e cristianesimo di base: L'esperienza dell'Isolotto di Firenze* (Roma: Ediesse, 2011), 37-38.

⁶ Comunità dell'Isolotto, *Isolotto: 1954-1969* (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1969), 10 and Comunità dell'Isolotto, *Isolotto Sotto Processo* (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1971), 20.

⁷ For more on the politics of housing in postwar Italy and the Ina-Casa program, see: Poli, *Storie di Quartiere*, 15-64; Istituto Luigi Sturzo, *Fanfani e la casa: Gli anni Cinquanta e il modello italiano di welfare state, Il piano INA-CASA* (Rome: Rubbettino, 2002; Anna Minelli, *La Politica per la Casa* (Bologna: Società Editrice il Mulino, 2004); Stephanie Zeier Pilat, *Reconstructing Italy: The Ina-Casa Neighborhoods of the Postwar Era* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

⁸ Gomiti and Pini, *Memorie*, 116.

do so within a county that was itself undergoing significant economic and social transformations. During the “economic miracle” of the late 1950s and early 1960s, millions of Italians migrated from rural areas to cities and the national economy became one driven less by agriculture and more by industrial production and consumption.⁹ This chapter depicts the economic and social growing pains of Italians navigating this dynamic moment in the country’s history. For many Italians, these struggles were intertwined with similar conflicts happening within the Catholic Church. In parishes throughout Italy in the 1950s and 1960s, Church leaders attempted to use the sacred spaces of churches to shape Catholics’ ideologies. At the same time, lay Catholics in these new communities on the peripheries of Italian cities, and Italian society and the Church more broadly, were reflecting on what it meant to be Catholic as they built parishes from the ground up. The new social and religious relationships that developed between individual Catholics, and between laity and many parish priests, in the 1950s and 1960s resulted in the democratization of the Church years before the beginning of the Second Vatican Council.

2. Early Attempts at Community Formation

To serve as parish priest in Isolotto, Dalla Costa chose Enzo Mazzi, a young priest who had expressed a desire to separate himself from the bureaucratic entanglements of the institutional church and serve the poorest of society. Born on March 11, 1927 in the small village of Borgo San Lorenzo approximately twenty kilometers northeast of Florence, Mazzi experienced poverty and personal hardship at a young age. When Mazzi was thirteen, his mother died.¹⁰ During the war, an American aerial bombardment destroyed his family home, after which Mazzi lived in shared housing in the countryside where he encountered “actual partisans” and discovered the

⁹ For more on the economic, social, and geographical transformations of Italy during this period, see Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 210-253.

¹⁰ Bruno D’Avanzo, *Tra dissenso e rivoluzione: Gruppi cattolici a Firenze* (Bologna: Guaraldi Editore, 1971), 26.

“world of left-wing politics.”¹¹ Shortly thereafter, he was sent to a Salesian community for young children, where he remained for a brief time before entering the seminary.¹²

Later in his life, Mazzi remembered the nine years he spent in seminary as a “period of remarkable growth.” Mazzi and other young seminarians rebelled against what they deemed strict policies and antiquated traditions that dictated their daily existence. Locked in their individual cells overnight, Mazzi and others constructed crude radios so they could connect with a broader world. They smoked cigarettes provided by the families of certain seminarians. And it was in their cells at night that Mazzi and other seminarians began to read books banned by their superiors. Beyond youthful transgressions, seminarians sought to emulate the communal lifestyle and fraternal relationships of those they studied, particularly the apostles. To alleviate the hunger of their poorer members whose families were unable to provide food, they pooled their supplies, an act that angered the rector of the seminary. For Mazzi, his time as a seminarian taught him the value of both solidarity and disobedience, and reinforced his dislike for authoritarian institutions, whether religious or secular. By the time Mazzi was ordained as a priest in 1949, he was convinced there were more humane and effective approaches to reach and help people.¹³

Mazzi’s first placement was in the parish of San Gervasio, where he interacted with Florentines who had been evicted from their homes, as well as refugees from within Italy and its territories overseas who were temporarily being housed in villas in the nearby wealthy suburb of Fiesole. During his service in San Gervasio, Mazzi established a strong bond with Dalla Costa, so much so that Mazzi felt the archbishop viewed him “as a son.” During their frequent conversations, Mazzi repeatedly conveyed a desire to serve the poor and disadvantaged as a missionary in Africa, South America, or China. Thus, when Dalla Costa had difficulty finding a

¹¹ Sergio Gomiti and Fabio Pini, eds., *Memorie: 50 anni all’Isolotto* (Firenze: Comune di Firenze, 2006), 32.

¹² D’Avanzo, *Tra dissenso*, 26.

¹³ Gomiti and Pini, *Memorie*, 61-63.

priest willing to accept the assignment in Isolotto, he thought of Mazzi, who after some reflection, accepted his mentor's request and joined the new residents, who, like many other Italians, were in need of "moral, psychological, and religious support."¹⁴

On December 5, 1954, shortly after arriving in Isolotto, Mazzi delivered a sermon during the first Mass held in the private chapel that would serve as the parish's temporary spiritual center until construction of the church was completed in December 1957. Addressing the faithful, Mazzi declared "we are all truly brothers, that we form one large family of which Jesus is the first father." Mazzi stressed that he did not intend to institute a rigid parish structure in the new community. Instead, he would follow the example of Jesus's words and actions, including, if necessary, "the same sacrifice of my life that up until now I have willingly offered to our common Father for the good of all who live in Isolotto." He looked forward to the village becoming a true community where all were welcomed "without distinction of origin, education, occupation, without economic or political distinction, [and] that looks to love each other, to help each other, to collaborate in the solutions of the many problems that urgently need to be resolved."¹⁵

Articulated in his first sermon, Mazzi's approach to community formation represented a significant critique of the aspirations, ideologies, and visions of national and local politicians, as well as members of the Catholic Church's hierarchy, who viewed planned communities like Isolotto as grand sociological experiments of modernity that would hopefully contain and transform working-class Italians' economic, political, and religious behavior. Mazzi rejected the politics of exclusion practiced by the institutional Church, which was an active participant in

¹⁴ Gomiti and Pini, *Memorie*, 32-34.

¹⁵ EMP 0305-1, "Omelia domenicale," December 5, 1954. In his address, Mazzi stressed that he was available to help with any issue at any time. While he would be temporarily living as a guest of the parish priest in Monticelli, he hoped to find, within the next month, a small room within the community where people could reach him.

Cold War ideological conflicts.¹⁶ To offset potentially dangerous political, social, and cultural tensions in Isolotto and foster a cohesive community, Mazzi's spiritual and social endeavors were marked by a politics of inclusion that was made possible through material actions that met the everyday needs of residents. While the traditions of the Church and the practices of Catholicism might serve as a common ritual for some residents, Mazzi felt that a different approach was needed to unify the entire community. He accomplished this by radically reimagining the space of the community, and the places within it. Of prime importance for Mazzi's efforts was the space of the parish church. Upon its completion in December 1957, it quickly became more than the religious center of the parish; it became the social heart of the community. Yet, even before the completion of the church, Mazzi recognized the deep-rooted tension between precarity and permanence that accompanied such a building, and the behavior of many who might use it. Throughout his tenure as parish priest, Mazzi hoped the church would not become a fortress for the powerful and wealthy or an instrument of exclusion that would fragment Isolotto upon confessional, social, regional, and political lines. Thus, even while the church played a prominent physical and symbolic role in organizing the satellite city in the late

¹⁶ For more on the role of the Catholic Church, and the actions of Catholics and other religious actors more broadly, in Italy and elsewhere around the globe during the highs and lows of the Cold War, see: Peter C. Kent, *The Lonely Cold War of Pope Pius XII: The Roman Catholic Church and the Division of Europe, 1943-1950* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002); Dianne Kirby, ed., *Religion and the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Anthony Rhodes, *The Vatican in the Age of the Cold War* (Norwich: Michael Russell Ltd, 1992); Philip E. Muehlenbeck, ed., *Religion and the Cold War: A Global Perspective* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012); David Kertzer, *Comrades and Christians: Religion and Political Struggle in Communist Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Tom Buchanan and Martin Conway, eds., *Political Catholicism in Europe, 1918-1965* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Gerd-Rainer Horn and Emmanuel Gerard, eds., *Left Catholicism: Catholics and Society in Western Europe at the Point of Liberation, 1943-1955* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001); Alessandro Brogi, *Confronting America: The Cold War Between the United States and the Communists in France and Italy* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Robert A. Ventresca, "The Virgin and the Bear: Religion, Society and the Cold War in Italy," *Journal of Social History* 37, 2 (Winter 2003): 439-456.

1950s and early 1960s, Mazzi strove to create a community that both emphasized and deemphasized the importance of the church as a sacred space.¹⁷

Upon his arrival in Isolotto in December 1954, Enzo Mazzi sought to build a broad and cohesive community that transcended the normal parish structure. Encountering a population of several thousand new residents who lacked a communal history and whose only shared experiences included war, poverty, and displacement, Mazzi embraced every opportunity to incorporate religious activity into the individual and communal lives of Isolotto's residents.¹⁸ Since the tiny chapel in which Mazzi celebrated Mass on Sundays only had space for thirty to forty parishioners, he considered other occasions of collective celebration such as baptisms and weddings to be of significant symbolic and social value.¹⁹ These moments fostered a sense of community by allowing the faithful and other residents to experience what Richard Kieckhefer has described as the "shared perception of objects and events that engage[d] the senses as well as the mind."²⁰ These celebrations not only represented the importance of family, the joy of new beginnings, and a sense of hope for the participants, they were often seen by many residents as positive bellwethers for Isolotto. Equally important, these events provided opportunities for residents to gather together, socialize, and forge communal bonds.

Mazzi further sought to foster a sense of community by organizing a social center that was open to every resident of Isolotto, regardless of their religious belief, political affiliation, or economic status. He hoped that such a center would serve as a temporary substitute for other

¹⁷ In his history of postwar Italy, Paul Ginsborg emphasizes the importance of the parish for both the institutional Church and the social lives of everyday Italians in the 1950s (Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 168-169).

¹⁸ De Vito, *Mondo operaio*, 41.

¹⁹ Gomiti and Pini, *Memorie*, 58. According to one resident, Guglielmo Moscarda, additional faithful would often stand in the street outside during the worship service.

²⁰ Richard Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 99. In his study of church architecture, Kieckhefer identifies the diverse ways in which both secular and religious communities may be formed. According to Kieckhefer, sporting events, political campaigns, and "objects of collective consciousness" represent key moments for a secular community, while liturgical worship "is the defining moment" of a sacred community.

more permanent buildings and organizations, such as a parish church. Mazzi's efforts during the early years of Isolotto's history not only helped develop a sense of community in Isolotto, they played a crucial role in forging a strong bond between the parish, and Mazzi as the parish priest, to the needs, concerns, and aspirations of the residents.

The first of Isolotto's socio-religious moments occurred shortly after Mazzi's arrival, when he baptized Alessandro Giovanni Giorgio Cianci, who was born in the early morning hours of January 5, 1955. Alessandro's young parents, Viola Pia from Pisa and Francesco from Siracusa, Sicily, who worked for the Florentine police department, were part-time students. Shortly after the delivery, the parents, who with their relocation to Isolotto had realized their dream of owning a modern home, announced they had given their son the middle name of Giorgio in honor of Florentine mayor Giorgio La Pira, who they felt was largely responsible for constructing the village. Francesco Cianci also expressed his desire for La Pira to serve as Alessandro's godfather.²¹

Alessandro's baptism five days after his birth was also a significant symbolic and social moment for the entire community of Isolotto. In addition to Alessandro's relatives, a crowd of residents and government officials, including the boy's godfather, Giorgio La Pira, Florentine Police Chief Dr. Luigi Russo, a representative of the community's chapter of Catholic Action, and many others crowded into Isolotto's temporary chapel. Assisted by Police Chaplain Don Morone, Mazzi was visibly "moved during the sacred rite." In his oration, Mazzi declared Alessandro to be "a symbol of rebirth to the Grace of our entire still growing parish, of which he [was] the first fruit donated" by God.²² The broader significance of Alessandro's birth was noted

²¹ "E' figlio di due student il primo bambino nato all'Isolotto," *Il Giornale del mattino*, January 6, 1955.

²² "Al villaggio dell'Isolotto battezzato il primo bambino," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, January 31, 1955 and "La prima grazia dell'Isolotto," *il Focolare*, February 13, 1955. Mazzi had to receive a dispensation from Dalla Costa to hold

in the media, as he was hailed as “a sign of life for a city that still does not exist and where up until a few months ago there was nothing but active construction sites, unfinished roads, engineers, and busy workers.”²³ For many in Isolotto and Florence, Alessandro’s birth and baptism symbolized the promise of an unknown future.

Isolotto’s new residents soon had another reason to celebrate when Mazzi officiated the weddings of six couples in April 1955. The first couple to be married, Giancarlo Bondi, a porter at Florence’s Santa Maria Novella train station, and Mara Bertini, had lived for sixteen months in a center for those evicted from their homes before moving to Isolotto. They had decided to wait an additional six months to wed so they could properly furnish their home. The Biondi-Bertini wedding, which took place two days after Easter, inaugurated the “season of weddings” in Florence, during which it was estimated that in the second half of April 1955 over a thousand people would marry. After celebrating the wedding, Mazzi noted he was excited to be celebrating so many nuptials so early in the life of the community. As one newspaper declared, the six weddings in April made Isolotto “almost a complete city.”²⁴

Beyond the communal celebration of baptisms and weddings, Mazzi sought to develop a sense of community in the new city by establishing spaces where residents could socialize and create new connections. Early in his tenure as parish priest, Mazzi rented, with the support of Dalla Costa and the assistance of several social workers from ONARMO (*l’Opera nazionale assistenza religiosa e morale agli operai*—the National Institute of Religious and Moral Assistance to Workers), eleven rooms in an old factory and turned it into a social center for the

the baptism in the chapel since it did not have a baptismal font. After the ceremony, Alessandro received numerous gifts, including a small gold chain from the police chief and a collection of clothing from the prefect.

²³ “E’ figlio di due student il primo bambino nato all’Isolotto,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, January 6, 1955.

²⁴ “Ieri le prime nozze nel villaggio dell’Isolotto,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, April 12, 1955. Traditionally, during Lent, marriages were only celebrated in urgent cases. Thus, the end of quaresima, the fourteen-day period that ends with Easter, and the arrival of Spring, usually initiated a hectic period of marriage celebrations.

community, which opened on May 1, 1955. The center, which was open to all residents regardless of their political interests, social standing, or religious beliefs, was hailed by one newspaper as “an organism articulated according to the highest standards of modern sociology.” It housed an afterschool area for local kids that included spaces for playing games and watching television, a reading room, a nursery, evening education classes and job training, moral and financial assistance, and recreational clubs for hunters, skiers, and other sports. In addition, the two ONARMO assistants who directed the center distributed clothing and food to local families in need.²⁵ Mazzi hoped that given the absence of a permanent parish church, the center would fill a needed gap in the early social life of the community and provide residents with a place to gather and discuss pressing issues. There was a danger, however, which Mazzi constantly sought to mitigate, that some “militant Catholics” would see such a social space as an opportunity to “reproduce in Isolotto the divisions and separations that they were used to in their original parishes.”²⁶

Besides the social center organized and guided by Mazzi, a second center also opened in 1955. Created with oversight by Ina Casa officials, it was initially housed in one of Isolotto’s apartments that had remained empty. According to Daniela Poli, a scholar of architecture at the Università degli Studi di Firenze who has written a history of Isolotto, the two centers “work[ed] in parallel, in synergy, without envy or jealousy.” While the ONARMO center provided social opportunities, moral assistance, and material aid to individual residents and families, the Ina Casa center “promot[ed] the social integration” of Isolotto’s residents. As such, it focused on helping residents from rural backgrounds accommodate to their new surroundings, both in

²⁵ “Il Prefetto visita all’Isolotto il Centro di collaborazione sociale,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, August 20, 1955 and De Vito, *Mondo operaio*, 42.

²⁶ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 13.

regards to the items in their apartments and the “new rules of intersubjective relations” that governed the daily administration of each resident-run building.²⁷

In 1959, Mazzi closed the ONARMO social center as its original role was being met by other organizations in the community, some of which were affiliated with and housed in the parish church. Mazzi was also concerned that the center was “becoming a parish superstructure” that served to divide and separate residents into “rival categories of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ and ‘neighbors’ versus ‘strangers.’” Even with these fears, Mazzi considered the social center a successful endeavor since it had highlighted “a fundamental aspect of [his] pastoral line.” To Mazzi, if the residents of Isolotto wanted to be a united community, they needed to continue to form new associations, open up spaces of communication, and resist the urge to divide themselves into small and exclusive groups based on political views, social identities, or religious beliefs.²⁸

Mazzi’s efforts to celebrate communal events and open the social center during the first few years of his tenure as parish priest were part of a larger effort to create an atmosphere of inclusivity at the local level. While politicians at the regional and national level, as well as members of the Catholic Church’s hierarchy, attempted to limit access to certain spaces according to religious dogma and political doctrine, Mazzi sought to bridge political and religious divides. In addition, Mazzi’s experience with the social center not only anticipated similar struggles that would continue to hinder social cohesion in Isolotto, but emphasized his willingness to prioritize the formation of communal bonds over the demand for, and protection of, sacred space reserved for certain individuals and groups. This approach to sacred space would

²⁷ Poli, *Storie di Quartiere*, 128-129.

²⁸ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 12-14 and “Il Prefetto visita all’Isolotto il Centro di collaborazione sociale,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, August 20, 1955.

become more evident, and lead to new criticisms, once Isolotto's church was consecrated and the community, and its priests, became more involved in local social, political, and economic issues.

3. "A City Needs a Church"

On October 31, 1954, Cardinal Dalla Costa blessed the ground where Isolotto's church would be constructed and laid the foundation stone for the building.²⁹ Eight months later, during a ceremony marking the second assignment of keys to residents, Dalla Costa directly addressed the gathered officials, including Arnaldo Foschini, the president of the Council of Management for Ina-Casa, and Florentine mayor Giorgio La Pira, who had just proclaimed that "every creature needs to feel anchored to three roots: a house, a job, a church." Dalla Costa urged those in power to act quickly in completing the church, declaring "it has been said that this is a new city, but a city needs a church. We have given to this parish a priest, but there is an urgent need of a parish church. We hope to return here soon to bless it."³⁰ Originally scheduled to be completed by Christmas of 1955, bureaucratic complications temporarily delayed construction of the church, with labor on the project finally recommencing a few months after Dalla Costa's plea.³¹ After additional issues delayed the completion of construction until days before Christmas 1957, many Florentines viewed the church as "a miracle of charity and [the] tenacious will" of Mazzi, Dalla Costa, La Pira, and Isolotto's residents.³²

Coadjutor Archbishop of Florence Ermenegildo Florit consecrated Isolotto's new church on December 21, 1957.³³ The following morning, a Sunday, a large crowd of the faithful

²⁹ "Duecentocinquanta alloggi consegnati ai senza tetto e ai profughi," *La Nazione*, November 1, 1954.

³⁰ "Consegnati nuovi alloggi all'Isolotto: Altre duecentoquarantotto famiglie hanno da ieri la loro nuova casa," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, July 25, 1955. During the ceremony, La Pira and other officials distributed keys for 255 apartments to Isolotto's newest residents.

³¹ "A Pasqua la nuova chiesa dell'Isolotto," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, September 22, 1955.

³² "L'inaugurazione della chiesa dell'Isolotto," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, December 23, 1957 and "La chiesa dell'Isolotto," *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, December 24, 1957.

³³ "Consacrata da S.E. Mons. Florit la nuova chiesa dall'Isolotto," *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, December 22, 1957 and "L'inaugurazione della chiesa dell'Isolotto," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, December 23, 1957. The church's official

gathered as Mazzi celebrated the Holy Mass. Present in the congregation were the building's architects, Guido Morozzi and Primo Saccardi, and numerous civil officials including the vice-Prefect and a representative of Florence's police chief.³⁴ Over three years in the making, Isolotto's church symbolized the hopes government officials attached to specific spaces within Isolotto, as well as the idea of the community itself. For Ina-Casa officials, Isolotto's church represented "a work of collective use, designated to provide religious, moral, and social assistance" to its working-class residents.³⁵

Also present in Isolotto's church that Sunday morning was Primo Conti, the artist responsible for creating the grand crucifix positioned directly behind the main altar in the middle of the back wall. Conti's crucifix was designed to transfix the attention of all those who entered the building. Over four meters in height, "a huge Christ, of human and divine expression of singular energy" stood out "with an exceptional importance in its blue tones on the intense white of the walls."³⁶ Although influenced by Conti's previous experiments with Futurism and Cubism, the crucifix nonetheless garnered the praise of newspapers affiliated with a more conservative Catholic viewpoint. *L'Avvenire d'Italia* noted that the "crucifix balanced the tradition of the fourteenth century with elements of modernity contained within the most correct limits of creative inspiration."³⁷ Nearly a year after the church's consecration, Mazzi noted that many visitors had felt compelled to discuss Conti's crucifix "on a high artistic plane" and it was

name is Santa Maria Madre delle Grazie. Mazzi and several local seminary students assisted Florit in the consecration ceremony. For the official document consecrating Isolotto's church, see EM Documenti 009. According to law #2522, which outlined the state's involvement in the construction of new churches and was officially approved on 18 December 1952, individual dioceses had the right to build churches in current and future parishes. To obtain funds from the Minister of Public Works, dioceses were to submit proof of the necessity of the construction, architectural plans for the building, and prior approval from the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Art (*Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana*, Anno 94, Numero 5, January 8, 1953, 67-68).

³⁴ "L'inaugurazione della chiesa dell'Isolotto," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, December 23, 1957.

³⁵ Documenti significativi 011, accettazione di donazione Fascicolo N. 1611, Repertorio N. 18178

³⁶ "Confessionali vasti come stanze nella nuova chiesa dell'Isolotto," *Resto di Carlino*, August 19, 1958 and "L'inaugurazione della chiesa dell'Isolotto," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, December 23, 1957.

³⁷ "La chiesa dell'Isolotto," *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, December 24, 1957.

“pleasing to all, without any exception, to traditionalists and modernists, as well as to abstractionists.”³⁸

While all buildings contribute aesthetically to their environment, churches “enter into a dialogue with the city, and even the territory, in a way that corresponds to the proper relationship between Church and the world.”³⁹ While Isolotto church’s simple architectural style did not resemble many of the “aesthetically ambitious churches” built throughout Florence, its architects and their clients and advisors (Dalla Costa and Mazzi) envisioned it having an equally “enlivening presence for the community.”⁴⁰ With their design, Morozzi and Saccardi sought to accomplish more than just construct a church for the new community. They were expressing, both architecturally and aesthetically, some radical ecclesiological ideas that matched the forward-looking vision of Isolotto’s priest, and even Florence’s archbishop.⁴¹

Morozzi and Saccardi designed Isolotto’s church as a Latin cross, the traditional plan of medieval churches, with the elongated nave of the church representing the long shaft of the cross of Christ.⁴² The church’s façade was composed entirely of rough, hard stone. The concrete roof covered by wood towered high above the still unpaved piazza.⁴³ The church’s main doors, which were flanked by two smaller doors, opened northwards towards the Arno River and the western

³⁸ “Confessionali vasti come stanze nella nuova chiesa dell’Isolotto,” *Resto di Carlino*, August 19, 1958.

³⁹ Crispino Valenziano, “Liturgical Architecture,” trans. Matthew J. O’Connell, in Anscar J. Chupungo, ed., *Liturgical Time and Space* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 394.

⁴⁰ Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone*, 100.

⁴¹ Mazzi once described Dalla Costa as “an old bishop in the type of Pope John: a traditionalist with a certain point of view, sort of like a cultural backbone, but profoundly innovative in his spirit and soul” (Gomiti and Pini, *Memorie*, 33).

⁴² Isolotto’s church was part of a larger parish complex consisting of numerous rooms designed for the priests’ living area, offices, and other social functions. For the purposes of this discussion, I will be focusing primarily on the worship space in the church.

⁴³ Frida Bazzocchi, “Il quartier Palazzo dei Diavoli,” *Tre quartieri INA-Casa in Toscana*, ed. Franco Nuti (Firenze: Polistampa, 2004), 113.

edge of Florence.⁴⁴ Four vertical narrow windows near the church's roof on each side of the building allowed "sunlight to flood the apse and three altars."⁴⁵ Religious and secular newspapers offered varied, yet overwhelmingly positive descriptions of the church's simple architecture, hailing it as "bright and welcoming, despite its cozy and devout air;" "vast, monumental, and modernistic;" and a "model of sacred architecture" designed to "target the eye and intelligence of scholars and amateurs."⁴⁶

Isolotto's church noticeably lacked a belfry and bells.⁴⁷ As Isaac Weiner has argued, "the right to make noise freely signals social power, for only certain institutions and individuals have regularly enjoyed the right to make themselves heard." Historically, church bells had dominated local "soundscapes" throughout Europe. They signaled moments of joy and sadness and warned parishioners when threats were near. The ringing of church bells "located individuals in space and time, mapped geographic boundaries, and demarcated the limits of social inclusion and interaction."⁴⁸ Church bells played such an important historical role in the social life of Christian parishes that some scholars have credited them with founding "acoustic communities."⁴⁹ Church bells had also frequently been objects of contestation. In Isolotto, the absence of church bells

⁴⁴ Traditionally, churches were often built with their sanctuaries facing east, which Douglas Davies argues might have been in part due "in relation to the rising sun and the symbolism of the resurrection" (Douglas Davies, "Christianity," *Sacred Place*, ed. Jean Holm (London: Pinter Publishers Ltd., 1994), 54.

⁴⁵ "Sei con noi, finalmente," *L'Avvenire D'Italia*, May 31, 1958.

⁴⁶ "L'inaugurazione della chiesa dell'Isolotto," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, December 23, 1957 and "Confessionali vasti come stanze nella nuova chiesa dell'Isolotto," *Resto di Carlino*, August 19, 1958.

⁴⁷ "Confessionali vasti come stanze nella nuova chiesa dell'Isolotto," *Resto di Carlino*, August 19, 1958.

⁴⁸ Isaac Weiner, *Religion Out Loud: Religious Sound, Public Space, and American Pluralism* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 20-23. For more on the history and importance of church bells and other forms of sound in urban and rural spaces, see: Niall Atkinson, "The Republic of Sound: Listening to Florence at the Threshold of the Renaissance," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 16, no. 1\2 (September 2013): 57-84, doi: 10.1086/673411; David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Alain Corbin, *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth-Century French Countryside* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Richard Cullen Rath, *How Early America Sounded* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

⁴⁹ R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Rochester: Destiny Books, 1993), 215.

pleased Mazzi, as he believed they had been too often used in the past for “vertical communication, from high to low, one-way.” Thus, the decision to build a church without bells represented a “modest sign of the desire to create a ministry based on the tools of communication of the poor, established on personal relationships.”⁵⁰

The interior of the church similarly reflected the architects’ intent, with the support of Dalla Costa and advice from Mazzi, to make an ecclesiological statement by constructing a new form of sacred space and religious community in Isolotto.⁵¹ Before the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) instituted profound changes to the Mass, it was a mysterious and foreign celebration performed primarily by priests and their male altar servers. The priest said Mass facing the altar with his back to the parishioners. The altar was usually separated from the faithful by an altar rail. The entire celebration, including the responses, made by either the altar server or the congregation, was in Latin. For most Catholics in the 1950s, Mass was mainly a time for silent and individual meditation and prayer.⁵²

When parishioners arrived for their first Mass in Isolotto’s new church in 1957, they were shocked by their surroundings. They did not find the traditional layout with the altar bounded by a vast area of sacred space reserved solely for the priest. Rather, the main altar had been positioned in a more central position so that it could be encircled by the faithful.⁵³ This position spatially reinforced the sacrality of the altar and deemphasized the importance of the priest.

⁵⁰ Enzo Mazzi, “Le doglie del parto, quattro racconti di Enzo Mazzi,” in *il mio '68*, ed. Comunità dell’Isolotto (Scandici: CentroLibro, 2000), 126.

⁵¹ In *A Theology of the Built Environment*, T.J. Gorringer argues that all buildings, whether they be stables, apartments, churches, or even collections of buildings, make moral statements (T.J. Gorringer, *A Theology of the Built Environment: Justice, Empowerment, and Redemption*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1).

⁵² To watch a Traditional Latin Mass filmed on Easter Sunday in 1941 at Our Lady of Sorrows in Chicago, click [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R6AOvStZS64) (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R6AOvStZS64).

⁵³ Douglas Davies argues that altars placed in the center of churches create a “much more obviously sacred building with relatively little scope for other activities” (Davies, “Christianity,” *Sacred Place*, 54.) Richard Kieckhefer, however, argues that the experience of a church is a primarily personal one, meaning that during each gathering, different people are reading the church as if it were different texts. He warns against “simplistic assumptions grounded in an uncontextualized misreading of [a church’s] architecture” (Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone*, 6).

During the Mass, Mazzi and Father Sergio Gomiti, who had joined Mazzi in Isolotto in July 1957, faced the congregation, a gesture signaling all believers were part of the sacred community.⁵⁴

The location of Isolotto's altar and the orientation of its priests in regards to the faithful were atypical for Italian parishes in the 1950s and early 1960s. The changes initiated by Mazzi and Gomiti would not be officially sanctioned for use until the second session of the Second Vatican Council and the publication of *The Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)* in December 1963, as well as the subsequent distribution of the "First Instruction for the Right Application of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council" (*Inter Oecumenici*) in September 1964. According to Article 91 of the first instruction, "the main altar should preferably be freestanding, to permit walking around it and celebration facing the people." As for the location of the parishioners, Article 98 states that "special care should be taken that the place for the faithful will assure their proper participation in the sacred rites with both eyes and mind."⁵⁵ The creation of Isolotto's church, with its unique visual imagery and architectural design, highlight how in some parishes around the Catholic world in the 1950s, the "reforms" introduced at the Council were actually being implemented and experienced years earlier.

⁵⁴ Gomiti and Pini, *Memorie*, 181-183. Gomiti arrived in Isolotto in July 1957, having left seminary eager to devote his life to the service of the most humble in society. Gomiti was born in 1931 in Bagno a Ripoli on the outskirts of Florence into a family of "priest-eaters" (*mangiapreti*) steeped in the Italian socialist tradition. His older brothers had worn red shirts in the streets in 1921, while his father had worked with Gaetano Pilati, one of the founding fathers of socialism in Florence who was murdered by fascists in 1925. Conversely, Gomiti's grandparents were completely supportive of the Catholic Church and its priests. His initial interest in the Church grew out of a desire to separate himself from the beliefs of his immediate family. Although Gomiti's socialist father supported his son's decision to enter the seminary, he was quite aware of the ideological and spatial divisions that existed between Catholics and Communists in Italian society, especially in the countryside where there were "Communists who watched who went to Mass and there were Christian Democrats who watched who went to the House of the People" (Gomiti and Pini, *Memorie*, 34-38).

⁵⁵ *Inter Oecumenici*, September 26, 1964, www. <http://www.adoremus.org/Interoecumenici.html> (accessed 24 August 2012).

Mazzi had already begun to lay the foundation for a different type of religious community before the completion of the new church. Since 1956, he had met monthly in Isolotto with a group of Florentine priests to study the Gospel and discuss practical issues regarding their preaching, pastoral work, and their lives. At one such meeting in February 1957, Mazzi and three others recorded their thoughts on topics such as the placement of the altar, the type of language used by the priest, and the collection of fees for the performance of the sacraments and other rites. In their document, the priests argued that the traditional location of the altar turned them into “an actor that completes gestures and recites incomprehensible prayers” and prohibited the development of a fatherly relationship between the priest and the faithful and a sense of fraternity among the parishioners. Furthermore, they disagreed with the use of an “amorphous language” in preaching that was “often rhetorical and moralistic, and almost always incomprehensible.” Such language fueled perceptions that priests were “guardian[s] of morality divorced from life.” In regards to the tradition of receiving money for ceremonies, the priests contended that this practice relegated them to “administrators, bureaucrats, [and] clerks.” They reasoned that just as it does not make sense for a child to ask their mother “how much for the darning of their socks,” the faithful should not be expected to inquire of the costs for a funeral or Mass. Instead, in a family, whether composed of biological members or members of the faithful, “everyone contributes according to their ability.” In closing, the priests condemned sectarian religious organizations that lacked “spirit” and aggravated social problems because they failed to understand or preach “brotherhood in the Church.”⁵⁶

Beginning shortly after the church’s consecration in December 1957, Mazzi and Gomiti realized that the altar’s central location magnified the “glaring incongruity of the Latin language”

⁵⁶ EMP 0018-1, February 7, 1957. The other priests listed on the document were Rossi (most likely Renzo Rossi, a factory chaplain), Scozzafava, and Masi.

and specific “repetitive and magical” gestures performed by the priests. Thus, they implemented the use of captions and Italian translations for certain prayers and readings used in some Masses, such as for weddings. While Mazzi or Gomiti quietly recited the prayers and readings in Latin, members of the faithful, often youths, used loudspeakers to broadcast Italian translations. However, certain aspects of the Mass, such as the dialogue between the priest and the faithful, remained in Latin at this point.⁵⁷

In 1959, Mazzi and Gomiti, in partnership with the laity, began to use translations of the dialogue during the Friday evening Mass, which was popular with a group of approximately thirty youths and young couples who met weekly with the priests to discuss the Bible and contemporary political and social issues.⁵⁸ Partially in response to the Liturgical Reform Movement of the nineteenth century, Church officials had attempted to make the Mass more engaging and accessible for individual Catholics.⁵⁹ For example, in 1903, Pius X, with *Tra le Sollecitudini* (“On Sacred Music”), issued regulations for the performance of music that not only promoted the proper decorum to be attained, but also sought to create more active participation by the laity.⁶⁰ Nonetheless, the decision to use the vernacular in religious ceremonies in Isolotto remained an uncommon practice during the late 1950s. Once again, significant alterations to the liturgy would be approved at the highest levels in the Council’s *The Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy*, which declared in Article 36.2 “since the use of the mother tongue, whether in the Mass, the administration of the sacraments, or other parts of the liturgy, frequently may be of great

⁵⁷ For a few examples of how the priests used both Latin and Italian in their services, see EMP 0125, “Didascalie e lettura per la messa degli sposi,” January 1958; EMP 0045, “Lettera e preghiera per la benedizione della casa,” February 24, 1958; EMP 0127, “Didascalie e lettura per la domenica fra l’ottava di Natale 1958,” December 28, 1958.

⁵⁸ For example, see: “Parrocchia di S.M. Madre delle Grazie—Isolotto—Firenze, Preghiere della Messa,” www.comunitaisoloto.org/Archivio/A1959/W09.htm, accessed April 12, 2011.

⁵⁹ For more on efforts to reform the liturgy, see: Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy: 1948-1975* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990) and Theodor Klauser, *A Short History of the Western Liturgy: An Account and Some Reflections* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

⁶⁰ *Tra Le Sollecitudini*, November 22, 1903, <http://catholic.net/op/articles/1825/cat/1197/tra-le-sollecitudini.html>.

advantage to the people, the limits of its employment may be extended.”⁶¹ Further publications, beginning with *Inter Oecumenici* in 1964, provided instructions as to how to translate religious texts and dictated which parts of the service could be translated into the vernacular.⁶²

Mazzi and Gomiti continued to make further changes to how they celebrated services. They advised both parishioners and residents of their revised policy regarding the payment of fees by distributing a document during liturgical celebrations and delivering it to all residents’ mailboxes. After noting they offered Mass every day for all, “without exclusion or some restrictions,” the priests declared that it was no longer possible for the faithful to ask or pay for private celebrations of the Mass or any other service, including weddings or funerals. Instead, parishioners should “see in the Church their ‘true’ family” with the priest representing their “father or mother” and “the other faithful (especially the poorest), their true brothers.” With this view of the Church, instead of seeing it as a “business,” their donations would be the “sign of their love and love remains the only measure as well as the only motive.” This new approach towards money would also fight the “widespread and deeply rooted” disease of “religious individualism,” instead helping the faithful embrace a collective Church. The laity could support this mission of love and unity by contributing to the offering collected during Sunday Mass, which would be allocated first to aid the poor, then to support the priests, and finally to help defer the parish’s other expenses.⁶³ Given the cultural, economic, and political climate of 1950s Italy, Mazzi and Gomiti’s decision to make these changes was quite radical. During the years of

⁶¹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, December 4, 1963, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html (accessed August 15, 2012).

⁶² After *Inter Oecumenici*, four more Instructions were published: *Tres Abhinc Annos* on May 4, 1967, *Liturgicae Instaurationes* on September 5, 1970, *Varietates Legitimae* on January 25, 1994, and *Liturgiam Authenticam* on March 20, 2001.

⁶³ EMP 0055 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 22-25. There is some confusion as to when this document was circulated. In the collection of documents *Isolotto: 1954-1969* and one of the community’s newsletters, the letter is attributed to the year 1957. However, in Isolotto’s archive and on their website, the undated document can be found under 1959 (week 16). Ultimately, the letter’s distribution date is not as important as the ideas and goals it outlines.

the “Economic Miracle” (roughly 1950-1970), Italian society underwent a rapid, if not homogenous, transformation, during which Italians’ consumption habits and their standard of living changed dramatically.⁶⁴ At the same time, Cold War ideological battles continued to be played out at the international, national and local levels. Thus, Mazzi and Gomiti’s de-emphasis of money, and the capitalist system that prioritized it, represented a rejection of the status-quo supported by the institutional Church.

Despite the placement of the altar, the absence of church bells, and the changes made to religious rituals, Mazzi and Gomiti nonetheless remained worried that the physical space of the church, while serving to enhance the spirits and activities of the faithful and priests, could also tempt the faithful to stop seeking new truths and new paths in their spiritual and social lives.⁶⁵ As with the social center, they feared the presence of the church might serve to divide parishioners and residents into groups based on their relative inclusion or exclusion from practices occurring within the building. For Isolotto’s priests, the church provided, if they and the parishioners so desired, an opportunity to retreat to a traditional parish model, which they felt eschewed the innovation and unity of a missionary parish. This tension between precarity and permanence took on extra significance for the residents of Isolotto, many of whom had recently experienced the placelessness of poverty.⁶⁶ Despite these misgivings, Mazzi remained confident that given the “fertile experience of three years of rapport between the priests and people based on poverty and indifference,” the residents of Isolotto would surmount such enticements. In the end, Mazzi

⁶⁴ Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 239-240.

⁶⁵ Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988), 172.

⁶⁶ Lane, *Landscapes*, 163.

hoped they would understand that God is not located in one place, the church, and would form a community based on Christian brotherhood and love.⁶⁷

4. “An Absolutely Extraordinary Event”

On November 15, 1958, directors of the Galileo factory, which made optical equipment, announced plans to dismiss 980 workers. Although the factory was located in Rifredi, a quarter northwest of Isolotto across the Arno River, a significant number of Galileo employees lived in Isolotto.⁶⁸ Indeed, almost half of Isolotto’s employed residents worked in the manufacturing industry, including trades in the metallurgical and mechanical industries as well as construction workers), and the largest professional classification in the community was that of skilled laborer.⁶⁹ In regards to its employment composition, the population of Isolotto, of which nine out of every ten employed residents worked for someone else, reflected the guidelines of the Ina-

⁶⁷ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 15-16.

⁶⁸ Marina Tartara, *L’Isolotto a Firenze: Indagine sui problemi di adattamento in un quartiere di edilizia pubblica* (Roma: Ente Gestione Servizio Sociale Case per Lavoratori, 1961), 39 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 113. Daniela Poli suggests that nearly 70 Galileo workers lived in Isolotto (Poli, *Storie di Quartiere*, 133).

⁶⁹ Tartara, *L’Isolotto a Firenze*, 29-32. Another quarter (24.8 percent) engaged in some sort of commercial activity or was employed in a service position (railways, public safety, traffic police, messengers, custodians, waiters, etc.). An additional 17.8 percent of residents identified as employees in administrative professions, while the smallest group of individuals (4.7 percent) held positions, which were considered by some to be more prestigious, in education, the military, and the Guardia di Finanza. While the percentage of Isolotto’s male residents who worked in business and service positions was nearly twice the percentage of female residents (28.1 to 15.1 percent), women more frequently labored in the manufacturing industry (57.6 to 41.7 percent), especially in factories that produced clothing, food, plastics, and tobacco products. In regards to residents’ positions within their professions, entrepreneurs and the self-employed (primarily shop owners) constituted 8.5 percent (8.3 percent of men and 9.1 percent of women), directors and managers represented 31 percent (33.3 percent of men and 24.2 percent of women), workers composed 44.2 percent (43.8 percent of men and 45.5 percent of women), and others such as those who worked at home, domestic servants, and unskilled laborers formed 16.3 percent (14.6 percent of men and 21.2 percent of women) of the total. In 1958-1959, 54.5 percent of adult residents older than the age of sixteen (90.3 percent of men and 25.5 percent of women) regularly engaged in a profession. Of the 45.5 percent of adult residents who did not have a steady career, first-time job seekers accounted for 0.8 percent, disabled residents formed another 0.8 percent, students comprised 1.5 percent, retirees represented 4.8 percent, and housewives constituted 37.6 percent of the total. While the percentage of women who identified as housewives (68.1 percent) was three times that of those who considered themselves regularly employed (23.4 percent), Tartara notes that the former nonetheless often worked as dressmakers, embroiderers, or laundresses from their apartments or in small factories on a part-time basis to supplement their family incomes. The 54.5 percent figure for Isolotto was notably higher than the percentage for the province of Florence in 1951, which was 46.6 percent (75 percent of men and 23.3 percent of women). This information is based on interviews and surveys Tartara conducted with the residents of Isolotto in 1958 and 1959.

Casa program.⁷⁰ This high level of dependency, along with the overrepresentation of certain company's employees in the quarter, created a volatile environment in which residents of Isolotto were particularly subject to the ups and downs of specific sectors within the local, national, and international economies. Thus, the proposed layoffs at Galileo threatened to disrupt the economic and social stability of Isolotto, as well as other communities throughout Florence.⁷¹

During the Galileo crisis of 1958 and 1959, Florentine Catholics played a pivotal role in providing emotional, religious, and financial support for the workers' cause. Catholic politicians and members of the Florentine Curia publicly defended the cause of the dismissed workers and sought solutions that would avert potential economic, social, and political crises. Priests throughout the archdiocese petitioned national leaders for assistance and held "penitential liturgies" demonstrating support for the workers of Galileo. In Isolotto, Enzo Mazzi, Sergio Gomiti, and members of the faithful joined with other residents in an effort to solve not just the immediate crisis, but also bridge the underlying political, social, economic, and religious divisions that had helped create an environment in which mass dismissals were possible. They formed working groups composed of residents with diverse interests, viewpoints, and backgrounds to brainstorm ideas and form new connections. Most importantly, and quite unique to Isolotto, the community hosted an "absolutely extraordinary event" that would solidify its reputation as one dedicated to action and social justice.⁷² On January 11, 1959, dismissed workers, many of whom were members of the Italian Communist Party, gathered in the parish church to discuss their plans to resolve the dispute. Given the institutional Church's historical

⁷⁰ Tartara, *L'Isolotto a Firenze*, 33.

⁷¹ For more on the Galileo crisis, see: *Libro bianco delle Officine Galileo* (Firenze: LEF, 1959); G. Contini, *Memoria e storia: le officine Galileo nel racconto degli operai, dei tecnici, dei manager, 1944-1959* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1985); R. Degl'Innocenti, *La crisi del 1959 e la Galileo*, in L. Falossi, ed., *Metalmecchanici fiorentini del dopoguerra. Atti della giornata di studio per I cento anni della Fiom* (Firenze, October 8, 2001) (Roma: Ediesse, 2002); "Le officine Galileo," *Testimonianze* (December 1958): 73-75; "Ancora sulla Galileo," *Testimonianze* (February 1959): 153.

⁷² Gomiti and Pini, *Memorie*, 11.

stance against Marxism and the political parties on the left, the decision to hold the assembly was not only bold but potentially risky for the priest. Nonetheless, for Mazzi, this was the type of assembly that should be held in the church.⁷³

For over fifty years, the Church had propounded a social doctrine that called for workers to be treated with dignity yet also fiercely condemned Socialism, Marxism, and the tactic of class warfare. In the 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (“Of Revolutionary Change”), Pope Leo XIII outlined the Church’s response to the social conflicts of the era, which had been fueled by rapid industrialization and the spread of socialism. While Leo XIII condemned the horrors caused by a capitalist ideology unanchored to the principles of natural law and social justice, he rejected the notion that “the wealthy and the working men are intended by nature to live in mutual conflict.” Instead, he argued that both classes held rights and duties to the other and “perpetual conflict necessarily produces confusion and savage barbarity.” While the State had an important role in ensuring order and protecting the right of individuals to possess private property, Leo XIII proclaimed there was “no intermediary more powerful than religion (whereof the Church is the interpreter and guardian) in drawing the rich and the working class together.”⁷⁴ Marking the fortieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, Pius XI’s *Quadragesimo Anno* (“In the Fortieth Year”) addressed both old and new concerns that continued to inhibit social and economic order. While Pius XI argued that the conditions of many members of the working class in various industrialized states had improved since 1891, he nonetheless emphasized the continued need for

⁷³ A decade later, when Mazzi, Gomiti, and a group of faithful were engaged in a conflict with the Florentine curia, the assembly would be remembered and held up as a key moment in the community’s evolution towards one that transcended political, social, and religious differences.

⁷⁴ Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, section 19, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_en.html, accessed August 14, 2014.

solidarity among workers and sought a third way between unfettered capitalism and the “alluring poison” presented by proponents of Socialism and Communism.⁷⁵

In the postwar era, faced with the specters of a powerful and hungry USSR, and the powerful presence of Socialist and Communist within Italy, the Church continued its assault against the ideologies of the political left. On July 1, 1949, the Catholic Church issued *The Decree Against Communism*, which prohibited Catholics from joining or supporting Communist parties, declared as illegal the acts of writing, reading, or disseminating documents or texts that support Communists or Communism, clarified that those Catholics who carry out these actions can be refused the Sacraments, and affirmed that those Catholics who propagated and affirmed the doctrine of Communism should be viewed as apostates from the Catholic faith.⁷⁶

The crisis that erupted over the proposed dismissals at the Galileo factory was not unique to Florence. In the decade following the end of the war in Italy, industrialists and smaller employers waged ideological and economic warfare against workers, particularly militant trade unionists. This conflict, which would be remembered by the working-class movement as “the hard years” (*gli anni duri*), occurred within a fierce anti-Communist political climate fueled by the war in Korea and the Christian Democratic government’s efforts to reorganize the economic sector with aid from the Marshall Plan and American financial institutions. In their efforts to boost productivity and crush the labor movement, employers also benefited from endemic poverty and substantial unemployment levels, as well as the fracturing of Italy’s labor movement along political, ideological, and confessional lines.⁷⁷ Clashes between employers and workers

⁷⁵ Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, sections 55 and 73, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius11/P11QUADR.HTM>), accessed August 14, 2014.

⁷⁶ The text of the decree, “Suprema Sacra Congregazione del Sant’Offizio, Scomunica dei comunisti (1949),” can be found in Paolo Pombeni, *Socialismo e cristianesimo (1815-1975)* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1977), 300. For more on the historical context for this decree, see Kent, *The Lonely Cold War of Pope Pius XII*, 242-243.

⁷⁷ The three largest trade unions were the CGIL (*Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro*), which had been formed to unite Communist, Christian Democratic, and Socialist workers with the Pact of Rome in 1944; the CISL

followed a particular pattern. After factory directors announced massive layoffs and lockouts, workers would occupy factories and seek to continue with production. Ultimately, workers' occupations, although symbolically important, rarely resulted in gains for the dismissed workers or the labor movement.⁷⁸

Even before the Galileo crisis in 1959, Florence had not been immune to this cycle of dismissals and protests. In 1953, a similar, albeit significantly smaller dismissal of workers inspired thousands of residents to rally in solidarity with the threatened workers and spurred local and regional politicians, including La Pira, to seek a solution that would avert the layoffs. In January of that year, directors of the Pignone factory announced the temporary suspension of three hundred workers and the termination of fifty older workers and seventy clerical employees as part of a cost-reduction program. Throughout Florence, and to a lesser extent Tuscany, thousands of residents rallied in solidarity with the threatened workers. While local, regional, and national politicians labored to avert the dismissals, a large group of Florentine women traveled to Rome to protest the action, and workers in Florence held a twenty-four hour general strike. During the crisis, Giorgio La Pira dispatched numerous letters to politicians and religious officials warning of the dangerous repercussions for Florence if the dismissals were made permanent. In a letter to Fanfani, who at the time was the Italian Minister of Agriculture, La Pira called the decision "irresponsible, illegitimate and a great injustice" and argued that "we should give them [the company's directors] a lesson." In October, the head of SNIA-Viscosa, the group that controlled Pignone, ordered the closure of the factory and the termination of nearly two thousand workers. In response, workers occupied their factory. La Pira wrote a letter defending

(*Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Liberi*), which was formed in 1948 by a group of Catholic trade unionists, Republicans, and Social Democrats; and the UIL (*Unione Italiana Lavoratori*), organized in 1950 by a bloc of Social Democratic, Reformist, and Independent unionists.

⁷⁸ Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy, 186-193* and Ronald L. Filippelli, *American Labor and Postwar Italy, 1943-1953: A Study of Cold War Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 211-216

the workers' action, arguing that they were, through the act of seizure, "defending their right because the Constitution prohibits the closure and recognizes the right to work...it is not the workers who are outside the law but the industrialists!" He further declared that the city would work to defeat the economic-minded decisions of the company and would ultimately win against such a "cruel injustice" because they had God's blessing. Many in Florence, especially more conservative members of the Christian Democratic Party who believed in the absolute right of private enterprise, felt betrayed by La Pira's actions and letters and attacked him for views they felt dangerously resembled those professed by communists. During this controversy, La Pira scolded his critics for their lack of humanity and, in letters to Italy's bishops and Pope Pius XII, argued that the history of the Church is a history of revolt. To resolve the crisis, La Pira, with the help of his friends in the De Gasperi government, proposed the creation of a new corporation, "New Pignone," which would have joint ownership: sixty percent by the energy firm *Ente nazionale idrocarburi* (ENI) and forty percent by SNIA-Viscosa. Shortly thereafter, the workers ended their occupation of the factory on January 4, 1954.⁷⁹

In 1958, two days after Galileo's directors announced the dismissals, a large contingent of Galileo workers marched from the factory on the periphery of the city to Florence's historic center. In the late afternoon, they staged a massive and prolonged protest, voicing their concerns and demands and snarling rush-hour traffic for hours.⁸⁰ As had happened in 1953, large segments of Florentine society rose to defend the threatened workers in the days, weeks, and months following the announcement of the dismissals. La Pira sent telegrams to the directors of SADE (*Società Adriatica di Elettricità*), the group that held the majority interest in Galileo, and Amintore Fanfani, the Italian prime minister. In his message to Fanfani, La Pira argued that the

⁷⁹ Rodolfo Doni, *Giorgio La Pira: Profeta di dialogo e di pace* (Milan: Figlie di San Paolo, 2004), 75-93. For more on the Pignone crisis, see G. Galli, *...Ha difeso la Pignone* (Florence: Libreria editrice fiorentina, 1984).

⁸⁰ "Firenze solidale con gli operai della 'Galileo'," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, November 18, 1958.

events in Florence had national repercussions, encouraging his friend to “vigorously defend the sacrosanct cause of Florentine workers and [devise] a policy inspired by the authentic liberty of justice and the defense of the valuable social and spiritual industrial heritage not only of Florence but the entire nation.”⁸¹

In Rifredi, the priests of the community gathered to express their solidarity for the impacted workers and their families, many of whom resided in their parishes. In their coverage of these gatherings, newspapers noted that the “presence of priests, who [were] not union members, politicians, or economists,” signaled the importance of the crisis.⁸² Equally significant were some of the priests’ institutional affiliations. Of the twelve priests present at the Rifredi assembly, six were associated with the *L’Opera della Divina Provvidenza Madonnina del Grappa*, an institution founded by Giulio Facibeni in 1923. After serving as a military chaplain during World War One, Facibeni returned to Rifredi and dedicated his life to helping orphans, most of whom had lost their parents during the war. Since its founding, many of the most prepared and conscientious children of *Madonnina del Grappa* eventually found positions in the Galileo factory. Because of this “organic, familiar, and historic relationship” between the institute and factory, workers with diverse confessional, political, and ideological beliefs all held Facibeni in high regard.⁸³ Facibeni died on June 2, 1958, six months before the Galileo crisis

⁸¹ “Chiare parole dell’On. La Pira,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, November 16, 1958.

⁸² “Sacerdoti di Rifredi per la ‘Galileo’,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, November 20, 1958. The priests in Rifredi included Giuseppe Franci (Santo Stefano in Pane), Renzo Rossi, Brunero Pretelli, Renzo Innocenti (Sant’Antonio al Romito), Corso Guicciardini (Director of Madonnina del Grappa), Nello Pecchioli, Alfredo Nesi, Carlo Zaccaro, Felicino Turchi, Celso Quercioli, Alfredo Ciapetti, and Luigi Ongaro.

⁸³ “Sacerdoti di Rifredi per la ‘Galileo’,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, November 20, 1958 and Gomiti and Pini, *Memorie*, 125. Because of his work on behalf of orphans, refugees, and persecuted Jews during the Fascist era in Italy, Facibeni had been celebrated by local and national politicians, scholars, and Pope Pius XII. For more on Facibeni’s life and work, see: Luigi Augusto Torniai, ed., *Don Giulio Facibeni. Scritti* (Florence: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1960); Silvano Nistri and Franca Righini, eds., *Lettere di don Giulio Facibeni* (Florence: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1979); Silvano Nistri, *Vita di don Giulio Facibeni* (Florence: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 2004); Silvano Piovanelli, *Don Giulio Facibeni, “Il povero facchino della divina provvidenza”* (Florence: Società Editrice Fiorentina, 2008); Piero Paciscopi, *Don Giulio Facibeni. Profeta di Dio* (Florence: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 2014)

erupted in Florence. For many throughout Florence, the presence of priests from *Madonnina del Grappa* at the Rifredi prayer assembly for Galileo's workers symbolized Facibeni's continued presence among those to whom he had dedicated his life.

On November 25, Cardinal Dalla Costa released a public statement addressed to the priests and faithful of the archdiocese regarding the proposed dismissals. Dalla Costa argued that he "could not remain indifferent" to the tragedy befalling the workers and their families. After praying for the end of such a "serious disaster" in the archdiocese, he directed his thoughts to those responsible for the dismissals. Dalla Costa reminded Florence's industrial leaders that they should "recognize and observe their proper social obligations in the handling of their business" and to "make decisions dictated by truth and justice." Dalla Costa further chastised those in positions of political authority and economic power by suggesting that "those who do not use their assets for the good of the community hinder the affirmation of fundamental human and Christian values."⁸⁴ While many newspapers printed the full text of Dalla Costa's statement on the first page, it was also read during Sunday Mass two days later and affixed to the doors of all the archdiocese's churches.⁸⁵

Dalla Costa's notification drew significant private and public praise. La Pira sent the cardinal a telegram thanking him on behalf of all the workers of Florence, as well as for all Christian people everywhere. In his message, which was later published in several Florentine newspapers, La Pira declared that the archbishop's statement was "a type of act that recalls the gestures of the Prophets and Apostles of the Scriptures." Finally, Florence's mayor echoed Dalla Costa's sentiment by arguing that since work "is at the root of people, the family, human society

⁸⁴ "Una notificazione del Cardinale sulla crisi delle officine Galileo," *La Nazione*, November 22, 1958. Dalla Costa's notification is also reprinted in *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 113-114 and D'Avanzo, *Tra dissenso e rivoluzione*, 38.

⁸⁵ "In tutte le chiese la parola del Cardinale per gli operai della Galileo," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, November 24, 1958.

and the supernatural Christian vocation,” anyone who “violated this human right” also threatened the “foundation of [Italy’s] constitutional, social, and political edifice.”⁸⁶ Other media outlets placed Dalla Costa’s notification within a broader historical and religious context. The editors of *il Giornale* reminded its readers of Dalla Costa’s stand against Mussolini when he was the bishop of Padova, his protection of Jews and his efforts to keep Florence an open city during the war, and his efforts on behalf of workers during the Pignone crisis in 1953. The editors also attempted to link Dalla Costa’s statement with the official position of the Church, arguing that the doctrinal basis for Dalla Costa’s statement could be found in Pope Pius XI’s 1931 encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (“In the Fortieth Year”).⁸⁷ Indeed, the archbishop’s statement, while eloquently supporting the plight of Florentine workers, fully adhered to the official social doctrine of the Church articulated previously by Pope Leo XIII and Pope Pius XI. Dalla Costa’s letter chastised industrialists for their actions and reminded them of their duties to look after the welfare of workers, but it stopped short of calling for a systematic change to the entire structure of the capitalist economy.

Some Florentine Catholics, while paying thanks to Dalla Costa for his emotional and powerful appeal, questioned its effectiveness because of its timidity. An unsigned opinion piece published a few days after Dalla Costa’s statement challenged the moral standing of the industrialists, arguing the industrialists responsible for the layoffs “exist[ed] outside the community of believers” in Florence. Since their initial action contradicted mercy and justice, the author questioned why the directors would feel compelled to now listen or obey the archbishop.”⁸⁸

⁸⁶ “Grazie di La Pira al Card. Dalla Costa,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, November 23, 1958.

⁸⁷ “Una notificazione dell’Archivescovo di Firenze ai parroci e ai fedeli: Contro i licenziamenti alla ‘Galileo’ interviene il card. Dalla Costa,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, November 22, 1958.

⁸⁸ “Una frattura nella vita sociale Fiorentina,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, November 28, 1958.

Throughout Florence, many Catholics quickly responded to Dalla Costa's appeal for the faithful to unite in prayer and action. In the parishes of Rifredi, priests held a day of prayer on November 30 for the workers of Galileo. During many of the religious services, participants distributed flyers that included the text of Dalla Costa's statement, some writings by Facibeni, and excerpts from a letter Pope John XXIII had sent to his faithful when he was the Patriarch of Venice.⁸⁹ The largest prayer assembly, held in the evening, included the presence of La Pira and other local officials. During the service, the faithful recited a prayer that had also been posted outside the church:

O Jesus, Redeemer of men's lives, who has provided on earth a family, a house, a job, save our job, the foundation of home and family. Give to the people of Rifredi, who are in so much pain and anxiety, strength, courage, and unity of prayer and action. Protect the tranquility of all, safeguard our daily bread.

After the service, one of Rifredi's priests, Don Alfredo Nesi, praised the willingness of those present to form "a union, not a union of sentiment or just for the occasion, but the will to be in agreement in everyday life." Discussing the Galileo crisis, Nesi expressed hope that the demonstrations of unity and the actions undertaken by many Florentines would lead to a new approach to appreciating labor that would not only resolve the immediate issue in Florence, but put an end to the industrial crises that had plagued Italy in recent years. The priest closed his meditation by highlighting the importance of the factory within the social and religious community of the city. He argued that while the factory "has its own specific limitations of use, it is also truly for Jesus, a place of meeting, of cooperation, of human measure."⁹⁰

While the faithful of Isolotto frequently gathered to pray for the Galileo workers, they also sought to develop a solution for the immediate crisis as well as generate more permanent social change. Residents formed working groups composed of individuals with "disparate

⁸⁹ "Si riaccendono le speranze d'una soluzione per la 'Galileo'," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, November 30, 1958.

⁹⁰ "Firenze testimonia la sua solidarietà con la 'Galileo'," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, December 1, 1958.

mentalities,” which they hoped would “strike down barriers and prejudices that had lasted for decades.”⁹¹ They also created a “Committee of Solidarity for the Workers of Galileo,” which included Mazzi and Gomiti, local merchants, political party representatives, and other residents. The committee, in a public letter dated November 26, attempted to persuade Florentines of the justness of the group’s agenda. Echoing Dalla Costa, the group’s statement reached out emotionally, declaring that “no one, whatever their beliefs or their way of life, could remain unmoved in the face of such a dismissal [that] contrast[ed] the most elementary principles of humanity” and threatened the economic and social life of every resident. The committee also forcefully argued it was “absolutely unjust that the momentary absence of profit for the company must be paid for with the misery and the hunger of thousands of people.” For those individuals primarily influenced by economic concerns, the committee declared that the firings would harm the economic health of the city as the unemployed workers would spend 70 million lira less per month and the city would have to increase its expenditures on social services to help support nearly four thousand people. Finally, the committee declared that whether individuals “liked it or not, they were involved in this threatening disaster.” Thus, the committee argued, all Florentines should leap to action and participate in the initiatives and meetings that were being promoted throughout Isolotto and Florence.⁹²

The specter of the Galileo crisis continued to haunt Florentines as 1958 ended and 1959 began. In his end of the year homily, Coadjutor Archbishop Florit discussed the Galileo situation, telling the faithful gathered in the Duomo that while work might be a heavy burden for many to bear, it was also a “benefit from God” and a “source of [their] independence.”⁹³ Echoing

⁹¹ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 114.

⁹² EM Documenti 013, “A tutti I cittadini dell’Isolotto’ dal Comitato di solidareà per i lavoratori della GALILEO,” November 26, 1958. The letter can also be found in *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 114-115.

⁹³ “L’omelia di fine d’anno in Duomo,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, January 1, 1959.

Dalla Costa's November appeal, Florit argued that "the natural and Christian law of human solidarity" meant that no one should be denied "the necessity of having the means to preserving life." He appealed to the directors of Galileo "to do what they can... to ensure the continuity of employment for hundreds of workers threatened by dismissal."⁹⁴ As Dalla Costa did in his public letter, Florit used his remarks to depict a Church primarily fixated on its spiritual mission to help individual Catholics look inward to their own sins. While he encouraged the directors of Galileo to make decisions that would ease the suffering of Florentines, he refrained from dictating how they should act. Furthermore, he refused to indict the capitalist system for the crisis. To do so would mean embracing a vision of a more social Church that took positions on every social and political issue and sought to fight evil in the terrestrial realm. Of course, many Catholics and non-Catholics in Italy argued the Church had always taken sides in these types of conflicts and in regards to other issues.

On January 9, after lengthy meetings with regional and national politicians, the directors of Galileo agreed to reduce the number of employees targeted for dismissal from 980 to 480.⁹⁵ While the factory's management must have hoped that this partial reprieve would appease their critics and limit social discord, the reaction was quite different. Many Florentines had hoped for a complete reversal of the planned terminations. Angered and frustrated, approximately one hundred workers responded to the announcement by occupying sections of the factory.⁹⁶

In the days that followed, many Florentine Catholics joined with other residents in expressing their continued solidarity with the Galileo workers, their action, and their cause. The children of Don Facibeni published a letter in which they thanked the current and previous

⁹⁴ "Un grazie da Firenze al Cardinal Liénart," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, February 7, 1959.

⁹⁵ "Le conclusioni a Roma per le officine Galileo," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, January 10, 1959. Of the 500 workers who would be saved, 450 would remain in Florence, while another 50 would be transferred elsewhere.

⁹⁶ "Ore angosciose a Firenze: Cinquecento licenziati alle Officine Galileo," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, January 11, 1959.

workers of Galileo for donating some of their limited wages to the Institute. During a religious service in a crowded Rifredi parish, a priest denounced the layoffs, questioned the motivations behind them, and argued that they did not “correspond to the rules of natural and sacred law, to the teachings of the Church and Popes . . . and the fundamental basis of the Italian State.”⁹⁷ A group of one hundred women from Rifredi marched from their community to the historic center of Florence in an effort to speak with local officials and request the suspension of energy bills for those families impacted by the terminations.⁹⁸ Members of the Florentine Curia also strove to find a solution that would avoid economic and social hardship. Florit not only sent a telegram to the Minister of Labor Ezio Vigorelli, he met with the official as part of a Florentine delegation that had travelled to Rome to discuss the crisis with national leaders.⁹⁹

The faithful in Isolotto joined with other Florentine Catholics in expressing their support for the workers through press releases and prayers. However, in the days following the occupation of Galileo’s workshops, Isolotto’s church was the site of more than just prayer assemblies. On January 10, a group of workers approached Enzo Mazzi and asked permission to hold a meeting in the church as it was the only building in the community large enough to accommodate a huge crowd.¹⁰⁰ Given the reputation of the Galileo factory as one of “the most politicized in Tuscany, where militants and Communist sympathizers were the most numerous,” A decision to grant the workers’ request represented a significant risk for Mazzi.¹⁰¹ To hold an assembly in the church that drew Communist workers could be seen by many Catholics,

⁹⁷ “Giusta causa nell’industria per i licenziamenti e protezione della ‘Galileo’,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, January 12, 1959.

⁹⁸ “Agli operai della Galileo nuove manifestazioni di solidarietà (e una querela degli industriali),” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, January 15, 1959.

⁹⁹ “Per la vertenza della ‘Galileo’ un colloquio a Roma di mons. Florit con Vigorelli,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, January 18, 1959.

¹⁰⁰ Comunità dell’Isolotto, *Oltre I Confini: Trent’anni di ricerca comunitaria* (Florence: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1995), 23.

¹⁰¹ Gomiti and Pini, *Memorie*, 11.

especially ecclesiastical officials, as an act that broke with the Church's traditional social doctrine, which supported workers but condemned Marxism and its political progeny. Given the risk involved with this decision, Mazzi recommended the workers seek permission from Dalla Costa. In his meeting with a delegation of workers, the cardinal granted his blessing for the assembly. When a worker inquired as to whether the Blessed Sacrament should be moved to avoid contamination by the secular gathering, Dalla Costa declared it should remain in its usual place. He noted that Isolotto's church was "dedicated to the Mother of Grace [and as] a mother cannot close the door of her house to her children in trouble at their workplace, [the church] would not want to be dismissed by its primogenitor."¹⁰² With Dalla Costa's approval, the delegation of workers organized a meeting to be held in Isolotto's recently-built church for the next day.

On January 11, 1959, Isolotto residents and Galileo workers from districts throughout Florence gathered for the community discussion and rally. In front of the church's altar, several union representatives sat at a table draped in a red cloth.¹⁰³ In the pews, Catholics and Communists, or what observer described as the "pure and the impure," sat side by side.¹⁰⁴ During the meeting, several dismissed workers, some of whom had never entered or rarely spent any time as an adult in a church, stood up and addressed the crowd. Although Mazzi and Gomiti were present in the church during the assembly, they did not attempt to lead or influence the discussion, which was moderated by a fired Galileo worker.¹⁰⁵

For some Isolotto residents, the assembly, although carried out under a dark cloud of misfortune, helped connect community members who would not normally associate with each

¹⁰² As cited in Poli, *Storie di Quartiere*, 133. See also Comunità dell'Isolotto, *Oltre I Confini*, 26.

¹⁰³ Poli, *Storie di Quartiere*, 133 and De Vito, *Mondo operaio*, 60.

¹⁰⁴ Comunità dell'Isolotto, *Oltre I Confini*, 28.

¹⁰⁵ *Isolotto, 1954-1969*, 116 and Comunità dell'Isolotto, *Oltre I Confini*, 28.

other. One resident later recalled that holding the assembly in the parish church without the supervision of a priest was “very, very big.” Another declared that they “never knew the church could serve as something else.”¹⁰⁶ As these sentiments indicate, the assembly spatially reinforced a vision of the community Mazzi had been laboring to achieve since he arrived in Isolotto in December 1954. Even before Isolotto’s church had been completed a little more than a year before the Galileo crisis, Mazzi had sought to build an inclusive community of residents that transcended political, social, and religious divisions. The assembly on January 11, 1959 represented the first moment when the parish church stood as not just the religious heart of Isolotto’s Catholic community, but also as the entire quarter’s social, cultural, and political center.

A decade later, when Isolotto’s faithful were engaged in another clash with powerful economic, political, and religious forces, Mazzi, Gomiti, and others would remember the assembly for Galileo’s workers as a pivotal moment in the history of the community.¹⁰⁷ They would hail it as a step towards the reunification of Italian society and culture, which had been torn apart by an industrial economic system that alienated sites of production (factories) from workers’ homes, by the stark political climate of the Cold War that divided East from West, and by the institutional Church’s crusade against Communism that separated the faithful from the unfaithful.¹⁰⁸ They viewed their actions during the Galileo crisis, particularly the assembly where residents and workers were in charge of the church, as “a fundamental step in the maturation of

¹⁰⁶ Gomiti and Pini, *Memorie*, 121-125.

¹⁰⁷ For speeches and assemblies from 1968-1972, see: EMP 0423/1968-8-98, “Omelia per la IV Domenica di Quaresima 1968”; BA 016, “Isolotto e disoccupati Amiata,” March 2, 1969; BA 018, “Comunità a Siena e Piancastagnaio,” March 8, 1969; BA 028, “Incontro con emigrati a Zofingen, Svizzera,” April 25, 1969; BA 042, “Enzo Mazzi riferisce su Assemblea preti solidali a Roma. Il suo intervento,” October 16, 1969; BA 049, “Veglia di Natale. La strada dei pastori e quella di Erode,” December 24, 1969; BA 051, “Assemblea popolare a S. Margherita Belice nei locali ECA con i terremotati,” January 26, 1970; BA 079B, “Prosegue assemblea generale,” March 8, 1972.

¹⁰⁸ Comunità dell’Isolotto, *Oltre I Confini*, 25-27.

the people towards a unity that exceed[ed] Catholic solidarity and partisan strategies.” Finally, at a time when Mazzi, Gomiti, and some laity in Isolotto felt under attack from the Catholic hierarchy in Florence, they gained sustenance from the actions of the community in 1959, claiming it reflected the “evangelical values present in those that battle and suffer for justice, values that are often obfuscated and betrayed by magical and foreign apparatuses of the liturgical rite.”¹⁰⁹

The assembly for Galileo’s workers also represented the moment when Mazzi, Gomiti, and a collection of the faithful in Isolotto became more active participants in the political struggles that dominated Florentine and Italian society. Taking public positions had the potential to increase criticism of the priests and their actions. Indeed, during the Galileo crisis, some Italians criticized the statements and actions of Florentine Catholics. *Il Tempo*, a daily Roman newspaper, questioned the loyalty of Catholic officials, particularly Florit, arguing that “red agitators [had been] comforted by the evangelical statements of Christian pastors” who had essentially legitimized the illegal occupation of the Galileo factory.¹¹⁰ In response to this forceful attack, *l’Osservatore Romano*, the semi-official daily newspaper of the Vatican City State, defended the efforts of Florit and others. The paper suggested their statements and actions were “proof of the civil and social charity that the clergy sincerely nourish and effectively employ” and declared that the Church sought “justice, within order and outside of all despicable violence, be recognized and desired.”¹¹¹ Within a day of *l’Osservatore Romano*’s editorial, Pope John XXIII echoed the paper’s call for solidarity and dignity. At a reception for representatives of *l’Unione Cristiana Imprenditori Dirigenti* (“The Christian Union of Industrialists and Managers”), the pope declared that “employers and workers are partners in a common task that

¹⁰⁹ Comunità dell’Isolotto, *Isolotto Sotto Processo*, 48-49.

¹¹⁰ *Il Tempo*, January 29, 1959.

¹¹¹ “I preti in sacrestia?,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, January 30, 1959.

in fact demands mutual understanding and a sincere effort to overcome the temptation and incentive to seek personal advantage.”¹¹²

In Isolotto, the assembly, as well as the other actions undertaken by Mazzi, Gomiti, and an active group of laity, led to the formation of new connections between some local Catholics and residents who subscribed to Communist or Socialist ideologies. Many on the political left interpreted Mazzi and Gomiti’s willingness to support Galileo’s workers, a group considered by many to be “the crème of the excommunicated,” as abnormal acts of friendship for priests.¹¹³ Nonetheless, the event created a lasting impression throughout certain political circles in Italy.¹¹⁴ Although the assembly represented an effort by Mazzi and Gomiti to stay true to their deep religious conviction in the righteousness of the poor and oppressed, it led to unintended consequences by enhancing divisions between those on the political left and right in Isolotto and Florence.¹¹⁵ Some Catholics and other Italians viewed the events in Isolotto as more than just an attempt to regain order, support the poor, or proselytize to the proletariat. For critics of Mazzi and Gomiti, their decision to allow Socialists and Communists to enter the church and discuss political issues signaled the priests’ willingness to “openly take [the workers] side” and act in “defiance of Pius XII’s anti-red decrees.”¹¹⁶ Thus, while the gathering in Isolotto’s church helped form new bonds between residents previously separated by political partisan beliefs, it also created fractures within groups that, at least on the surface, had previously shared a common political and ideological viewpoint. The strengthening of these new relationships and the fraying

¹¹² “La parola del Papa agli imprenditori cristiani,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, January 31, 1959. The UCID was the counterpart to the Christian Associations of Italian Workers (*Associazioni cristiane dei lavoratori italiani*, ACLI), a lay Catholic association founded in 1944.

¹¹³ Comunità dell’Isolotto, *Oltre I Confini*, 23 and Gomiti and Pini, *Memorie*, 124.

¹¹⁴ Gomiti and Pini, *Memorie*, 11.

¹¹⁵ Gomiti and Pini, *Memorie*, 120-121.

¹¹⁶ Eric Cochrane, “Incident at Isolotto: Don Mazzi and his Little Flock,” *Commonweal* (January 9, 1970): 400. Cochrane is primarily referring to Pope Pius XII’s 1949 Decree against Communism discussed earlier in this chapter.

of old connections would continue later in the fall of 1959, when a new conflict occurred over the physical condition of Isolotto's elementary school. Once again, Mazzi, Gomiti, and the space of the parish church would play a key role in the protest.

5. Striking for a School

After Isolotto's inauguration in 1954, approximately eight hundred school-age children had been forced to attend overcrowded schools in nearby communities. In 1956, however, the city administration constructed five wooden barracks, which were located in the center of the community, to serve as the community's temporary school.¹¹⁷ Although officials repeatedly promised that a permanent elementary school would soon be erected, parents were forced, year after year, to send their children to these cramped buildings that were hot in the summer, cold in the winter, and generally considered to be the source of frequent respiratory problems that plagued the health of Isolotto's children.¹¹⁸ Mario Bencivenni, a resident who attended school in the barracks, later remembered them as a "precarious school" that, during cold winters, "had electric stoves that produced more unpleasant smells than heat."¹¹⁹ Like the community's defense of workers involved in the Galileo dispute, the protest for a school would reinforce the key role Isolotto's priests, and the parish church, played in the social, political, and religious life of residents. In addition, the strike served as a key moment in the ongoing formation within the community of a collective identity grounded in social justice and direct action. Finally, the campaign for a new school, unlike the Galileo crisis, positioned the residents of Isolotto against local government officials and caused concern among certain religious officials. The protest

¹¹⁷ In May 1958, a new daycare ("Madre delle Grazie") opened in the community. The school, which welcomed male and female children between the ages of two and six, was inaugurated by Coadjutor Archbishop Ermenegildo Florit, Don Mazzi, and numerous other local officials ("Il 'nido' all'Isolotto," *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, December 21, 1958).

¹¹⁸ Poli, *Storie di Quartiere*, 111.

¹¹⁹ Mario Bencivenni, as cited in Gomiti and Pini, *Memorie*, 109.

highlighted the incomplete status of Isolotto and powerfully demonstrated the tensions that remained between residents and those in power.

The inadequate conditions, or absence, of schools plagued local communities and large cities throughout Italy. In Florence, various city administrations had repeatedly discussed building new schools in Bellariva, Nave a Rovezzano, Mantignano, Cascine del Riccio, Varlungo, Novoli, and other communities. Many of the schools that did exist in Florence, as in other Italian cities, were outdated, especially since they often consisted of “old buildings that were meant to be convents or stables.” In some areas of the city, children attended classes in prefabricated barracks in worse shape than those in Isolotto. Other students faced significantly more intense challenges and dangerous risks. In Rovezzano, three hundred children living in housing projects were forced to split their school day between the overcrowded local elementary school and a private school, which required each student to trek along a busy street. In Cascine del Riccio, seventy children attended classes in four rooms of a private house that one newspaper described as having “antediluvian hygienic services.” Perhaps more than any other school, the centrally-located “Lavagnini,” with its 1,600 children attending classes in two shifts, most accurately represented the broken character of the educational system in postwar Florence. Over the years, multiple administrations had made plans to renovate the buildings. Just as often, however, officials failed to implement those plans and as a result, more and more students continued to crowd into the school’s limited and unsanitary rooms. In the fall of 1959, over thirty-two thousand elementary students were set to attend school in Florence. To properly educate these students, officials projected the city would need one thousand classrooms. Since only 535 classrooms were available, many of these students would be forced to attend school in the afternoon and some rooms would be required to house multiple classes at the same time.

The need for a safe and permanent elementary school was particularly pressing in Isolotto given the composition of the community. The process used by Ina-Casa officials to select residents who held regular employment resulted in a high percentage of young families living in Isolotto. In 1959, the average age of a resident was 32.7 years. Compared to the overall population of Florence, Isolotto contained a significantly larger population of those younger than twenty-one (30.2 percent of the community) and a much smaller group of residents fifty-five years and older (only 12.9 percent). School-age children (aged six to fourteen) represented 14.7 percent of Isolotto's residents, compared to 9.5 percent in Florence.¹²⁰

While only one in four residents aged sixteen and older had continued their education beyond elementary school, the importance of a proper education, and thus sound facilities, for Isolotto's children remained a priority for the entire community.¹²¹ Frustrated with officials' inability or unwillingness to address the situation, parents and other residents of Isolotto—including engineers, merchants, members of political and professional associations, and both Enzo Mazzi and Sergio Gomiti—formed the “*Comitato per la costruzione della scuola dell'Isolotto*” (“Committee for the Construction of Isolotto's School”) to lobby for the construction of a permanent school building.¹²² In the weeks before the new school year started

¹²⁰ Tartara, *L'Isolotto a Firenze*, 15-16. In addition, eighteen to thirty-five year olds comprised 25.1 percent, while thirty-five to fifty-five year olds made up 31.8 percent of the population in Isolotto.

¹²¹ Tartara, *L'Isolotto a Firenze*, 28-29. Tartara argues that the lower level of education was related to the “prevalent non-urban origins of the families” of Isolotto. Of those individuals who continued with their education, 16.9 percent completed middle school, 7.1 percent graduated from high school, and 0.4 percent earned a college degree. Although 5.1 percent of Isolotto's population could not read or write, this was only half of the Province of Florence's illiteracy rate for adults. The illiteracy rate for the Province of Florence cited by Tartara was from the 1951 census. Tartara suggests that this higher rate was partially due to the increased presence of agricultural workers and the higher percentage of elderly people, who were more likely to be illiterate. On average, male residents had higher educational levels than female residents. Nearly forty (38.5) percent of men had attended classes beyond elementary school compared to 12.8 percent of women. In addition, only 1.8 percent of men were illiterate, which was one quarter of the rate for women (7.9 percent). However, while the women of Isolotto tended to drop out of school earlier than their male counterparts, the only residents to obtain a university degree were women. This information is based on interviews and surveys Tartara conducted with 254 residents (114 men and 140 women).

¹²² “Gli alunni dell'Isolotto” disserteranno per i primi tre giorni la ‘scuola-baracca’,” *L'Unità*, September 30, 1959. Individuals representing the PCI (Italian Communist Party), PSI (Italian Socialist Party), PSDI (Italian Democratic

on October 1, the committee met in work groups and held general assemblies in rooms attached to the parish church, as it was deemed to be the only suitable place in the community.¹²³ On September 27, the committee published a letter in which they declared that “for five years we have tolerated with patience and understanding the reopening of the barracks at the beginning of school, in spite of the painful certainty that they are a true act of violence on the physical health and the cultural and human formation of our children.” Parents and residents on the committee argued that since the opening of Isolotto, they had faithfully believed in the assurances of government officials that construction would soon start. However, the lack of progress had forced them to take action. As a united group, the committee hoped “to make its voice heard by the relevant authorities” and to “coordinate or solicit every appropriate initiative” that would result in the immediate design and construction of a school. As a protest, the committee called for all parents of Isolotto to withhold their children from school for the first three days of October.¹²⁴

On October 1, while children in Florence were returning to school, Isolotto’s children, along with their parents, gathered in the school piazza but refused to enter the barracks.¹²⁵ The dramatic action taken by Isolotto’s parents and residents seized the attention of governmental officials. It also ensured that their protest would become a contentious issue within the broader political contest being waged between forces on the right and left in Florence and throughout Cold War Italy. Although the parents’ committee had sought the participation and support of a wide array of political parties and clubs before they began the protest, the local section of the Christian Democratic Party was notably absent from its ranks. In a communication dated

Socialist Party), PRI (Italian Republican Party), l’UDI (Italian Women’s Union), il “Club giovanale Stelvio,” il Circolo M. Pucci, il Circolo ricreativo dell’Isolotto and other local groups participated in committee meetings.

¹²³ Comunità dell’Isolotto, *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 109.

¹²⁴ EMP 0061, “I sacerdoti nel comitato per la scuola,” September 27, 1959.

¹²⁵ “Ritorno a scuola,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, October 2, 1959.

September 29, the section secretary respectfully declined an invitation for one of its representatives to serve on the committee.¹²⁶ Nonetheless, in a communique released to the press, the municipal committee of the party declared its support for the ultimate goal of the committee and described its efforts to convey this desire to the appropriate officials.¹²⁷ The reluctance of the local section of the DC to actively participate on the committee may have been due to the involvement of several local socialists in the early stages of the protest. Indeed, the first actions taken to organize the protest were carried out by individual members of the socialist section of Isolotto, who gathered approximately fifty members for a public assembly. The popularity of this meeting then led to further gatherings by parents and community members.¹²⁸

In contrast with the Christian Democrats, many parties on the political left expressed robust support for the protest. On the strike's third day, Adriano Seroni, speaking on behalf of Florentine communist deputies and senators, declared that "the just action of protest conducted by the families of Isolotto will not only lead to a solution for that specific problem, but will contribute effectively to the general struggle we must conduct because the Italian school must renew itself and adjust to the necessities of our time."¹²⁹ Such calls for protest and struggle caused a stir among those on the political right, as well as theologically conservative Catholics, who viewed themselves as combatants in an ideological battle for the soul of Italian, and Western, society against proponents of Marxist theory. The Catholic newspaper *L'Avvenire d'Italia* reminded its readers that "many unforeseen difficulties [had] prevented the implementation of the massive school program established by the Christian Democratic administration." In addition, it warned its readers that agents of extreme leftist parties were

¹²⁶ EM Documenti 016, "Al comitato per la costruzione delle scuole all'Isolotto," September 29, 1959.

¹²⁷ "Per la scuola dell'Isolotto anticipate la gara d'appalto," *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, September 30, 1959.

¹²⁸ De Vito, *Mondo operaio*, 48-49.

¹²⁹ "Una dichiarazione di Seroni sulle baracche dell'Isolotto," *L'Unità*, October 4, 1959.

unfairly using the school strike as propaganda to influence the upcoming administrative political campaign “where anything goes and nothing is better than a ‘parents’ strike’.”¹³⁰

This was not the first time that the condition of Italy’s educational system had sparked Cold War ideological conflagrations among politicians, intellectuals, and theologians. Just one year before Isolotto’s parents waged their protest, the publication of Don Lorenzo Milani’s *Esperienze pastorali (Pastoral Experiences)*, which bore the imprimatur of Cardinal Dalla Costa, rocked Catholic intellectual circles. Lorenzo Milani Comparetti, who had been born in Florence on May 27, 1923 to a Jewish mother and gentile father and who had experienced the material benefits and cultural privileges of growing up in one of the city’s most respected families, converted to Catholicism at the age of twenty in 1943. Four years after receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation from Dalla Costa, Milani became an ordained priest in 1947 and took up a position as chaplain to the elderly parish priest of San Donato a Calenzano, located northwest of Florence near Prato.¹³¹

Struck by his new parishioners’ poverty, lack of education, and disenfranchisement, Milani started a school and began to vocally criticize those in power, such as the Christian

¹³⁰ “‘Manovre’ all’Isolotto,” *L’Avvenire d’Italia*, October 3, 1959. Poli argues the La Pira administration had a plan to build schools in communities like Isolotto, but for various reasons, including a constant lack of funds and bureaucratic disputes, the plan was never put into action. For instance, an April 1959 article in *L’Avvenire* details the assurances city and provincial officials gave to a group of Isolotto residents who had complained about the lack of work on the community’s elementary school and its pedestrian bridge across the Arno. While the officials were confident that, after a few modifications, the plan would be approved the following month, the article strikes a less than optimistic tone, noting that “some delays may be caused by bureaucratic procedures” (“Presto i lavori per la scuola all’Isolotto,” *L’Avvenire d’Italia*, April 8, 1959). Perhaps the most significant factor regarding the delayed construction of a school in Isolotto had to do with the development of the land on which the school would be built. The plot (*la Montagnola*), which was composed of material from a landfill, was initially deemed too dangerous and unstable for construction to proceed. To create a stabile area large enough for the school’s foundation and surroundings, massive amounts of dirt had to be transported to the site, resulting in the emergence of a significant plateau on which the school was constructed.

¹³¹ Mario Lancisi, *Dopo la “lettera,”: Don Milani e la contestazione studentesca* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1980); 11-12. For more on Milani’s life and work, see: Gruppo Don Milani Calenzano, *Don Lorenzo Milani. Riflessioni e testimonianze* (Florence: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1988); Neera Fallaci, *Vita del prete Lorenzo Milani: Dalla parte dell’ultimo* (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1993); Giorgio Pecorini, *Don Milani! Chi era costui?* (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi, 1998); Bruno Becchi, *Lassù a Barbiana ieri e oggi: Studi, interventi, testimonianze su don Lorenzo Milani* (Florence: Polistampa, 2004); Michele Gesualdi, ed. *Lettere di don Lorenzo Milani. Priore di Barbiana* (Rome: San Paolo Edizioni, 2007).

Democratic party, who had betrayed their commitments to social justice best expressed in the Gospel and Church encyclicals such as Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*. In the early 1950s, Milani openly clashed with Florentine Catholic officials, including Dalla Costa, when he objected to decrees made by Tuscan bishops instructing the faithful to vote only for Christian Democratic candidates.¹³² In December 1954, the Florentine Curia banished Milani to the remote parish of Sant'Andrea in Barbiana, which consisted of a small church and cemetery and a few primitive houses perched on the side of Mount Giovi to the northeast of Florence. The parish had actually been selected for closure, but the Curia kept it open for the sole purpose of Milani's exile.¹³³

As he did in San Donato a Calenzano, Milani began to assist and advocate for his parishioners. He established an open and free school dedicated to helping local children develop linguistic skills by reading newspapers so they could defend themselves against those who used dogmas, traditions, and laws to exploit them. Milani articulated his pedagogical goals in *Esperienze pastorali*. He believed that without a superb command of the Italian language, the poor and working classes inhibited their own advancement, since they "don't want to speak about politics, nor of unions to avoid stressing their inferiority."¹³⁴ Milani condemned those who had ignored and multiplied the suffering of people like those in San Donato and Barbiana. In a section devoted to information and the media, Milani decried the lack of independent journalism in Italy. Secular and Catholic newspapers were tools used to perpetuate class conflict because "one can kill not only with scythes and pitchforks, but also with layoffs, with evictions, with

¹³² Lancisi, *Dopo la "lettera,"* 12-13.

¹³³ Lancisi, *Dopo la "lettera,"* 36.

¹³⁴ Lorenzo Milani, *Esperienze pastorali* (Florence: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1958), 202.

high prices, with the police, with legitimization and praise for these four institutions, and with the denigration of strikes and the other poor weapons of unions.”¹³⁵

To many residents of Isolotto, Don Milani was an important intellectual and religious figure.¹³⁶ Similar to Milani’s views of the press, they believed that *L’Avvenire*’s protests of political partisanship represented “a clear sign of fear of losing votes” in certain Catholic circles. They were confident that powerful Catholic groups allied with the Florentine Curia would have preferred Isolotto’s priests to refuse to serve on the committee during a pre-election period. Many members of the committee, including Mazzi and Gomiti, felt that Church officials viewed the priests’ support of the strike as a foolish action that brought them into close contact, if not under the control of, communists whose only goal was to discredit their political rivals, mainly the Church and their political allies, the Christian Democrats.¹³⁷

During the three-day strike, not one child attended school at the barracks. On the morning of October 4, as school finally opened in Isolotto, members of the committee met in the nursery school attached to the parish to consider the results of their action and devise future plans. In an earlier conference, representatives of the municipal government had promised the offer for the construction of the new school would be published within a few weeks and that financing for the project had mostly been acquired. While committee members appreciated these positive assurances, they nonetheless viewed them with wariness. After a lively discussion, the committee agreed to wait a few weeks to see what actions were taken by the city. If these efforts

¹³⁵ Milani, *Esperienze pastorali*, 216-217. For more on the charged debate provoked by Milani’s *Esperienze pastorali*, see Richard Drake, “Catholics and the Italian Revolutionary Left of the 1960s,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 94, no. 3 (2008): 457.

¹³⁶ Comunità dell’Isolotto, *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 16-17.

¹³⁷ EMP 0061, September 27, 1959 and Comunità dell’Isolotto, *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 111-112.

to build the school did not materialize, parents threatened to reconvene the strike and possibly remove their children from school.¹³⁸

While it would be a long wait until Isolotto's new school was completed in March 1963, many residents viewed the 1959 protest as an overwhelming success. It ultimately led to the construction of a spacious new building for Isolotto's children. In addition, many viewed the strike as "one of the points of integration" for the relatively new community.¹³⁹ The importance of the protest for a new school would continue to grow as the community became more politically and socially active. Ten years later, when a large segment of the community was engaged in a heated dispute with the Florentine Curia, they would look back on the school protest as "one of the first moments of struggle in the quarter that developed organically and in a unified manner."¹⁴⁰ Finally, for Mazzi and Gomiti, the protest reinforced the importance of the parish church as a gathering site for community members to discuss pressing social, political, and economic issues. However, the highly public, and controversial according to some, stance taken by Mazzi and Gomiti resulted in an increased prominence within Florentine political and religious circles. Like Don Milani, advocating for the educational rights of impoverished youth made Mazzi and Gomiti noble heroes to some Italians and dangerous apostates to others.

6. Conclusion

Building a broad-based community, whether in the parish or the entire quarter, remained a difficult task nearly five years after Isolotto's inauguration. While some residents continued to live in areas plagued by infrastructural issues, the entire population suffered from the absence of crucial physical and social spaces. In July 1959, 150 residents protested to the commissioner of the prefect about the conditions of the quarter. The group's statement included a long list of

¹³⁸ "Continua all'Isolotto l'azione per la scuola," *Il Paese del Lunedì*, October 5, 1959.

¹³⁹ Gomiti and Pini, *Memorie*, 96.

¹⁴⁰ Comunità dell'Isolotto, *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 113.

complaints, such as the lack of efficient waste removal services that led to garbage accumulating on the streets and the plugging of street drains after rainstorms, the absence of a constant police presence (the nearest station was a half kilometer outside the quarter), and the failure to install public lighting, which increased fears of personal safety at night. While these deficiencies contributed to an “atmosphere of semi-desolation,” they also represented to the residents proof that they were “considered ‘subordinate’ citizens.”¹⁴¹

For many residents, the most troubling aspect of living in Isolotto was not the continuing absence of infrastructural elements. Instead, of the nearly forty percent of residents who would have preferred to live elsewhere in Florence if they could retain a similar level of housing, almost half claimed the community’s social atmosphere was a significant factor.¹⁴² As one historian of Isolotto has argued, this absence of a community identity or spirit was due in large

¹⁴¹ “Cittadini di seconda classe gli abitanti dell’Isolotto?,” *Il Paese*, July 8, 1959. Three years later, representatives of a “Committee of Agitation” held a “frank” meeting with Florence’s deputy mayor, Enriques Agnoletti, and other city officials, during which they discussed Isolotto’s continuing problems. Residents of fifty-seven apartments on two specific streets faced issues of moisture, technical defects, and rooms that violated the building code. More broadly, the committee considered the size of the medical clinic to be too small, questioned the cessation of work on the elementary school, demanded that a substantial pedestrian bridge be built across the Arno, and complained about the lack of bus routes, a middle school, and a post office. During the meeting, officials explained that the work stoppage on the elementary school was due to a need for an additional survey that would require further approval. In addition, they acknowledged the absence of a significant bridge was troublesome and promised to study ways to find a suitable span. The following month, in May, an assembly of tenants approved an agenda that listed unresolved problems, including the state of some apartments and buildings and the delay in completing construction on a bank, post office, and medical clinic (“Assicurazioni dell’amministrazione Comunale per i problemi dell’Isolotto,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, April 4, 1962 and “Le richieste degli inquilini dell’Isolotto,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, May 19, 1962).

¹⁴² Tartara, *L’Isolotto a Firenze*, 66-67. Of those who said they would move if given the opportunity, the difference between men and women was negligible (38.6 percent men to 36.9 percent women). However, a much larger percentage of youth would have lived elsewhere, with 48.7 percent of 16-25 year olds saying yes, compared to 37.5 percent of 25-55 year olds and 29.2 percent of those 55 or older. A slightly higher percentage of residents who owned their apartments (42.7 percent) said they would move than those who rented (32.3 percent). 255 residents answered this question as part of Tartara’s survey. Of the many other reasons for moving listed by residents, 27.2 percent considered the distance from the city center to be important, 13 percent desired a general change of some sort, 9.8 percent wished to live in another specific area of the city, 8.7 percent cited the distance from work, 4.4 percent mentioned Isolotto’s physical defects, and only 1.1 percent claimed the cost of living in Isolotto to be prohibitive.

part to the presence of a desire for “individualistic lifestyles, [which were] in line with the general trend in a society that was undergoing a process of sudden modernization.”¹⁴³

By the early 1960s, however, Isolotto’s transformation into a self-sufficient and thriving community was readily becoming more apparent. In April 1962, a new piazza that was slated to include “artistic flower beds and cozy benches” replaced an overgrown area of old war gardens.¹⁴⁴ The following year, on March 20, 1963, Isolotto’s children, parents, and other residents were finally able to celebrate the opening of the community’s spacious new elementary school.¹⁴⁵ Earlier that month, the opening of a bridge connecting Isolotto to the Florence’s historic Cascine park on the north side of the Arno had excited Isolotto’s residents. Nearly a decade in the making, the construction project had faced budgeting delays and incurred protests from some residents who feared an “invasion of scooters, trucks, and the carts of gardeners.” For most in Isolotto, however, a new bridge would allow them to cross the Arno without having to pay the cost of a ferry and save at least thirty minutes each way, “a great gift” for those who had to labor all day long.¹⁴⁶ On March 4, 1963, Mazzi blessed the bridge and Giorgio La Pira cut the

¹⁴³ De Vito, *Mondo operaio*, 48.

¹⁴⁴ “Piazza Sansovino all’Isolotto,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, April 12, 1962.

¹⁴⁵ The school was composed of five separate pods, four of which contained six classrooms and a meeting room while the fifth and largest pod housed offices, a library, gym, and dining area. The school cost 260 million lire to construct and could hold up to 650 students. During the opening ceremony, La Pira delivered a speech in the new gymnasium and Mazzi blessed the rooms. La Pira assured the gathered crowd that the Comune would provide additional schools to accommodate the community’s growing population (“Finalmente la Scuola: Dopo anni di attesa, i bimbi dell’Isolotto sono entrati ieri nelle aule nuove—Una passerella per evitare i pericoli del traffico,” *La Nazione*, March 21, 1963 and “650 scolaretti hanno detto addio alle baracche—La scuola piu bella della citta’ per i bambini dell’Isolotto,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, March 20, 1963). Within a year, two new prefabricated schools, a middle school consisting of 24 rooms and another elementary school with 15 rooms were completed (“Il via per quattro scuole: due all’Isolotto e le altre a Coverciano,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, January 14, 1964).

¹⁴⁶ “Problemi della citta’ satellite: Pronto il progetto per il ponte dell’Isolotto mancano pero’ i denari,” *Giornale del Mattino*, February 7, 1957; “Bisogna che le Cascine non siano invase dal traffico,” *La Nazione Italiana*, August 27, 1957; “A Natale la passerella dell’Isolotto—Sara’ pronta con un anno giusto di ritardo sul previsto,” *Giornale del Mattino*, November 3, 1962; “La passerella dell’Isolotto,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, January 19, 1963. Given the dire need of Isolotto’s residents to cross the river and thus save time on their way to and from work, enterprising individuals raised money by charging for ferry rides. One person even built a shaky pedestrian bridge of wood and charged twenty lire for every crossing on foot and thirty lire per motorized crossing.

ceremonial ribbon and led a crowd of residents over the ninety meter span to Cascine.¹⁴⁷ Even with these infrastructural additions, which helped create a more complete Isolotto connected with the rest of Florence, the community remained a difficult place for many residents to develop close bonds with their neighbors.

Since his arrival in Isolotto in December 1954, Enzo Mazzi had labored to meet the everyday social and physical needs of residents through spiritual endeavors marked by a politics of inclusion. His efforts to radically reimagine the space of the community, particularly the parish church, as well as the actions that occurred within the church, had established the building as the social heart of the community. Throughout this process, Mazzi nonetheless recognized the temptation a parish church might represent for some residents, who had been without homes or proper residences for years before arriving in Isolotto. In addition, Mazzi worried that some residents and members of the faithful might fall victim to Cold War ideological conflicts and attempt to transform the church into a fortress for the powerful, an instrument of exclusion. By recognizing this tension between permanence and precarity, Mazzi's efforts during the first five years of Isolotto's existence anticipated the conflicts that would develop among Catholics during and after the Second Vatican Council who were torn between the need for, and recognition of, sacred space and the idea of a universal Church best expressed by the term the people of God.

Not all of Isolotto's residents, however, were happy with the changes implemented by Mazzi, and later Sergio Gomiti. In April 1959, the priests addressed their critics during a sermon. They began by discussing the Gospel reading for that morning, in which Jesus declared himself to be a pastor for all his flock. They told the faithful gathered in the parish church that they considered their role as priest to be a continuation of Jesus's mission. Moving to a brief summary

¹⁴⁷ "Accorciate le distanze per la citta'-satellite: La passerella dell'Isolotto e' stata inaugurata," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, March 4, 1963. Isolotto's pedestrian bridge was the eighth span across the Arno in Florence.

of Isolotto's history, they stated that over the last "four years we have sought to guide you according to our means and ability. We have above all tried to guide you towards Christ." While they were grateful that many in the parish appreciated the priests' efforts to implement ideas and policies they thought were "best for all, for the good of our parish and the entire Church," some had misunderstood or criticized the priests' intentions. They saw Mazzi and Gomiti as "modern priests who want[ed] to change everything," from the position of the altar to the broader direction of the Church. Refuting this claim, the priests argued they had only tried to carry out an "adjustment to [the parish's] consciousness." This change was not an "external one made just for aesthetics." Rather, they hoped to create a more substantial, permanent, and personal impact. Comparing Christianity to the life cycle of plants, they argued that while faith, like plants in winter, can appear to be "a little sleepy...the root and trunk are solid, because the root and trunk are Christ and Christ cannot change." The faithful, however, are "the branches, leaves, fruits... [that] need the fluctuating seasons." As the plant adapts to the changing seasons, humanity must "recognize and grasp the need to adapt to the mystery of Christ." Thus, the priests' actions were meant to "approach as close as possible to the reality of our faith that perhaps had been neglected." They sought to return items such as the altar back to its original role, as a "table" instead of a "canopy of superfluous things." The priests concluded the sermon by asking the faithful to "not look too superficially at what [they were] doing... [but to] reenter into the spring of Christianity, with commitment, with energy, with love."¹⁴⁸

Mazzi and Gomiti believed that the only way to reawaken belief within the laity was through the united effort of a body of believers, in which the clergy and faithful were equals. In a retreat held during March 1960, Isolotto's priests summarized how the relationship between

¹⁴⁸ EMP 0308, "Vangelo del 12 Aprile 1959," April 12, 1959 (<http://www.comunitaisolotto.org/Archivio/A1959/W15.htm>).

these two parties had deviated over time, from an early Church based on unity “with one heart and one soul” to the Council of Trent, which endorsed the “centralizing of every task on the part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, caus[ing] the fracture between the laity and the clergy.” To bridge this chasm and reverse the practice of the last four hundred years, Mazzi and Gomiti argued that every Christian had to “rediscover the true profession, regain the road of unity, and return to the parish the face of a community of believers.”¹⁴⁹ During the next decade, Isolotto’s priests and an active group of laity would seek to achieve these goals as they experienced the Second Vatican Council at the local level and sought to update the Church during the revolutionary atmosphere of the late 1960s.

¹⁴⁹ EMP 0476, “Ritiro del 12-13 Marzo 1960,” March 12-13, 1960 (<http://www.comunitaisolotto.org/Archivio/A1960/W11.htm>). Mazzi’s and Gomiti’s message in this retreat anticipated the language included in one of the most transformative documents to emerge from the Council, *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)*, which was promulgated on November 21, 1964 and placed a similar emphasis on the unity and equality of the entire community of believers, the People of God.

Chapter II **Occupying St. Peter's Basilica**

1. Introduction

On New Year's Day 1969, thirty Catholics gathered around the Altar of the Confession in St. Peter's Basilica. The group "urged the ecclesiastical authority to dialogue with the faithful" as a way to end the repeated clashes between lay Catholics and Church officials occurring throughout Italy. They then began to chant in unison and dispersed among other lay Catholics in the basilica. The papal police, who had been notified of the group's presence and actions by several priests, quickly ejected the Catholics from St. Peter's. In their coverage of the incident, *La Nazione* characterized the Catholics as a "roman group of dissent" and their actions as "a manifestation of protest," which was "truly new" and without precedent.¹

Two months later another group of sixty young Catholics entered St. Peter's to hold a prayer gathering in advance of President Richard Nixon's visit later that day. Stunned by the news of Nixon's official state visit to the Vatican, the group of Catholics had previously sent a letter to Paul VI imploring him to use "the weight of moral force [of the Church] to claim justice for the poor" and to fight against "social and racial discrimination, and imperialism." The group expressed confusion and disappointment that the pope could find time to meet with Nixon, a "representative of a country that had serious responsibility for the death" in 1966 of

¹ "I cattolici del dissenso manifestano in S. Pietro," *La Nazione*, January 2, 1969. Paul VI was not present in the Vatican as he was observing the day of peace at the church of Ara Coeli in Campidoglio.

revolutionary priest and guerilla fighter Camillo Torres, while being too busy to meet with priests or the poor.²

At the conclusion of the celebration of a “sung mass” complete with resplendently dressed altar servers and choir members, the Catholics distributed leaflets to the other faithful inside the cathedral and asked them to join together in “an act of love for the church” by meeting in front of the Altar of the Confession for a common prayer. In their flyer, the Catholics claimed Nixon bore responsibility for the “imperialist war in Vietnam, exploitation and oppression in Latin America, [and] racism and injustice in his [own] country” and sought to gain legitimacy from his visit with the pope. They urged Paul VI to “know that we do not want the seat of the apostles to be considered one state in the world, with which it exchanges diplomatic representatives.” Thus, the Catholics hoped the pope would meet with Nixon as a bishop and not as a “head of state.”³

Shortly before noon, the group, which by that time had been joined by additional priests, nuns, and other faithful, began to read and discuss various Bible passages and writings that addressed global issues such as famine and economic underdevelopment. Monsignor Piovesana, the parish priest of St. Peter’s, who was accompanied by a member of the Vatican police, asked the Catholics to stop their discussion and leave the cathedral. When a young Catholic asked Piovesana to join the prayer meeting, the priest responded that Catholics could only pray individually or with a priest, in this instance him. When the group refused to disperse, Piovesana left and returned a few minutes later with additional agents. After a brief struggle, in which the kneeling and praying Catholics offered only passive resistance, members of the papal police

² “Lettera di cattolici romani a Paolo VI per la visita di Nixon in vaticano,” *Nuovi Tempi*, March 2, 1969. After sending their letter to Paul VI, and not receiving a response, they distributed the text to various newspapers and journals for publication.

³ “La calda domenica nella casa di Dio: Hanno pregato senza permesso,” *Mondo domani*, March 16, 1969.

forcibly removed the group members from the basilica, reportedly yelling at them to “go pray in the churchyard.” At noon, shortly after the Catholics’ eviction, Paul VI addressed the crowd gathered in St. Peter’s Square. Making a desperate last attempt to communicate with the pope, a member of the group began to read aloud from the pamphlet they had distributed earlier in the basilica.⁴

Catholics justified their gatherings in St. Peter’s in January and March of 1969, as in other churches and cathedrals throughout Italy, Western Europe, and Latin America, by invoking their identity as part of the people of God, a concept that gained importance during the Second Vatican Council and was viewed by many lay Catholics as an endorsement of a more horizontally-structured and inclusive Church composed of active and knowledgeable believers. Catholics also chose to gather in St. Peter’s because of its spiritual, social, and spatial significance within the Church and the broader world. They hoped to address problems facing both Catholics and non-Catholics and initiate dialogue with ecclesiastical officials about how the Church could respond to the demands of an increasingly fast-paced and global society. By gathering in St. Peter’s, these Catholics also replicated meetings between Catholics of various ideological positions, theological viewpoints, and geographical backgrounds who had assembled

⁴ “La calda domenica nella casa di Dio,” *Mondo domani*, March 16, 1969. In its analysis of this incident, the editors of *Mondo domani* argued the demonstration “against a political church-state and in name of a church more credible according to the evangelical spirit, assumed such a form of rupture against some schemes of protocol that the authority of the Vatican state, from the legal point of view, found the right to intervene.” However, the editors believed that the clash could have been avoided if Monsignor Piovesana had ignored the formalities of protocol and joined the prayer meeting when invited. According to *La Nazione*, as Nixon’s helicopter arrived at the Vatican later that afternoon, there were a few clashes in Piazza Pio XII between a small number of youth waving “red scarfs and shouting anti-American slogans” and others gathered for the event. Several individuals “with hostile intentions” resisted efforts by the police to disperse the crowd, including “a girl who spoke with a foreign accent” and a man with “a mustache and a garish yellow jersey” (“Lievi incidenti in S. Pietro e fuori—Nella basilica e’ intervenuta la gendarmerie pontificia per far allontanare giovani cattolici dissenzienti—Tafferugli in piazza Pio XII,” *La Nazione*, March 3, 1969).

in the same basilica during the four sessions of the Second Vatican Council between 1962 and 1965.⁵

Throughout the Council, fathers passively and actively resisted members of the Roman Curia's repeated attempts to spatially inscribe power in the Council hall within St. Peter's Basilica, which they hoped would constrain discussion of certain topics and limit the influence of those not aligned with the traditional sources of power in the Church.⁶ By refusing to speak in Latin, leaving their assigned seats to assemble and discuss issues in alternative spaces, distributing pamphlets, delivering fiery speeches, and applauding particular speakers and ideas, some Council participants, like the lay Catholics who occupied churches in the late 1960s, sought to create a space for dialogue on global issues facing the Church and its approach to the modern world. These individuals attempted to use the power and holiness of one of the most sacred buildings in the Church to advance their reform agenda. Yet, at the same time, the social character of these protests and initiatives enhanced the sacred nature of the St. Peter's Basilica. Thus, the actions of some Council participants can be seen as a blurring of the substantial and situational definitions of sacred space.⁷ Some members of the hierarchy sought to curb and condemn these initiatives, which they viewed as not only violations of the sacred space of the basilica but also the process and spirit of the Council they envisioned. Thus, the

⁵ St. Peter's is one of four major, or papal, basilicas in the Catholic Church, the other three being St. John Lateran, St. Paul Outside the Walls, and St. Mary Major (*Santa Maria Maggiore*). All four of these papal basilicas, which were given their titles in the fourteenth century, are located in Rome. In addition, there are over 1,700 minor basilicas located around the world as of June 2016 (<http://www.gcatholic.org/churches/bas.htm>). The November 9, 1989 document, *Domus Ecclesiae*, issued by the Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, details how those churches that have historical and aesthetic value and "have particular importance for liturgical and pastoral life" may gain the title of minor basilica ("Granting the Title of Minor Basilica," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, accessed January 4, 2018, <http://www.usccb.org/about/divine-worship/policies/minor-basilica.cfm>).

⁶ Composed of various administrative congregations, tribunals, and offices, the Curia constitutes the Vatican's bureaucracy.

⁷ The substantial definition of sacred space posits that certain spaces possess intrinsic and powerful elements that distinguish them from other, non-sacred spaces. The situational definition argues that no space is inherently sacred, but that they are made sacred through the actions of those inhabiting the space. For more on the differences between these viewpoints on sacred space, see the introduction to this dissertation.

phenomenological characteristic of both the Council's congregations and the occupations of 1968 and 1969 can be seen as a combination of attempted dialogue, repression, and struggle.

2. The Battle for the Council Before It Began

On January 25, 1959, John XXIII, who had been elected pope just three months earlier, announced to a small gathering of cardinals his intention to convoke "an ecumenical council for the universal Church."⁸ High-ranking ecclesiastical officials had contemplated, discussed, and explored the idea of another council for decades.⁹ Both of John XXIII's immediate predecessors, Pius XI and Pius XII, considered either reconvening the Vatican Council convoked by Pius IX and held between December 1869 and October 1870 or calling a new council.¹⁰ Since the beginning of his pontificate, John XXIII had held discussions about the possibility of convoking a council with numerous Church officials, many of whom opened up to the pope about the

⁸ Giuseppe Alberigo, "The Announcement of the Council: From the Security of the Fortress to the Lure of the Quest," in *History of Vatican II*, eds. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (English version), vol. 1, *Announcing and Preparing Vatican Council II* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 1. For another account of this announcement, see: Henri Daniel-Rops, *The Second Vatican Council: The Story Behind the Ecumenical Council of Pope John XXIII*, trans. Alastair Guinan (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1962), 11-14. John XXIII's address took place after he celebrated Mass at the basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls (*Basilica Papale di San Paolo fuori le Mura*), which concluded his tour of the four ancient Roman Basilicas (the other three being St. Peter's, St. John Lateran, and St. Mary Major). In addition to his announcement of a Council, John XXIII also called for a diocesan synod for Rome (Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII: Pope of the Council* (London: Chapman, 1984), 319-320).

⁹ Vatican II was the 21st ecumenical council in the history of the Church, dating back to the First Council of Nicea in 325 C.E.

¹⁰ Pius XI briefly mentioned in his encyclical *Ubi arcano* (December 23, 1922) about the possibility of reconvening the Vatican Council and shortly thereafter he sanctioned research into the feasibility of the idea, which involved seeking feedback from high-ranking Church officials (cardinals, archbishops, bishops, prelates) and took place in 1923 and 1924. Pius XII sanctioned an initial study of the idea in March 1948, and in February 1949 he created a Central Commission to oversee planning conducted by numerous sub-commissions for a future council. Although preparations concluded in 1951, historian Joseph Komonchak notes how several individuals believed support for a council remained strong in the last years of Pius XII's pontificate. For more information, see the following: Joseph A. Komonchak, "Popes Pius XI and Pius XII and the Idea of an Ecumenical Council" (unpublished paper, Department of Religious Studies, Catholic University of America, 2011), <https://jakomonchak.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/pius-xi-pius-xii-on-a-council.pdf>; Joseph A. Komonchak, "Pope John XXIII and the Idea of an Ecumenical Council" (unpublished paper, Department of Religious Studies, Catholic University of America, 2011), <https://jakomonchak.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/john-xxiii-idea-of-a-council.pdf>; Francis J. Weber, "Pope Pius XII and the Vatican Council," *The American Benedictine Review* 21, no. 3 (September 1970): 421-424; Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII*, 306-312; Giovanni Caprile, "Pio XI, la curia romana e il concilio," *La Civiltà Cattolica* 120, no. 2 (1969): 121-133; Giovanni Caprile, "Pio XII e un nuovo progetto di Concilio Ecumenico," *La Civiltà Cattolica* 117, no. 3 (1966): 209-227.

problems they faced in their dioceses and the challenges of working with the Roman Curia.¹¹ Not everyone with whom John XXIII shared his thoughts felt that convoking a council was the proper decision. The papal secretary, Monsignor Loris Capovilla, suggested a council would be too much stress for John XXIII, who had recently celebrated his seventy-seventh birthday. Other individuals could only quietly consent, as they felt they were not in a position to persuade John XXIII against a council or they ascertained that the pope's decision had already been made. The pope himself sought to preemptively subdue concern about the idea of a council by sending Capovilla to present a talk in Venice designed to reinforce John XXIII's identity as a conservative who had good reason to convene the first council in nearly a century. The pope's concern of a negative response to his announcement from members of the Church hierarchy was realized on January 25, 1959 when the cardinals present remained quiet in their chairs, their faces void of any expression.¹² Outside of this elite and small circle of ecclesiastical power, however, news of John XXIII's pronouncement stunned Catholics and non-Catholics and generated excitement, hope, and fear around the world.¹³

In the years leading up to the beginning of the Council's first session on October 11, 1962, members of ten preparatory commissions, along with interested bishops and theologians,

¹¹ Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII*, 307. Cardinals Ernesto Ruffini and Alfredo Ottaviani, both of whom would play major roles during Vatican II, claimed to have broached the usefulness of a council when they visited with John XXIII, then Cardinal Angelo Roncalli, on the eve of his election. Ten years earlier, both Ruffini and Ottaviani had urged Pius XII to convene a council and Ruffini had earlier encouraged the newly elected pope to consider the idea in 1939. In 1923, Pius XI had also weighed whether to call a council to demonstrate the unity of the Church in the aftermath of World War One's destruction, which had also pitted Catholic against Catholic. Giuseppe Alberigo does not dismiss the possibility that Ruffini and Ottaviani spoke about a council with Roncalli. However, he suggests that the "hypothesis that there was agreement at that time on the convocation of a Council is less persuasive" (Alberigo, "The Announcement of the Council," in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 1, 3).

¹² Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII*, 308-322.

¹³ Upon hearing of the pope's decision to convene a council, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini of Milan, the future Pope Paul VI, remarked that "this holy old boy doesn't realize what a hornet's nest he's stirring up" (as quoted in Peter Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI: The First Modern Pope* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), 284). In his account of the Council, Bishop Robert E. Tracy of Baton Rouge, Louisiana remarks he learned of John XXIII's announcement by overhearing a conversation in the hallway of a Chicago hotel between a couple who had seen an article in the evening newspaper. Tracy then hurried to buy a newspaper for himself (Robert E. Tracy, *American Bishop at the Vatican Council* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), 1-3).

sought to control the future event's course, content, and potential outcomes. As Peter Hebblethwaite has argued in his biography of Paul VI, these preparatory meetings were contested affairs and “acted as a dress rehearsal for the conflicts of the Council.”¹⁴ This contest was dominated by members of the Roman Curia, who were commonly labeled by many in the press as “intransigents.” The three leaders of this faction were Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani (secretary of the Holy Office, which was renamed the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith in 1965), Cardinal Giuseppe Siri of Genoa, and Cardinal Ernesto Ruffini of Palermo.¹⁵ Of special importance, the Technical and Organizational Commission (TOC) oversaw the planning and construction of a Council hall that could host solemn ceremonies open to the public and general congregations where the official work of Vatican II would take place. Led by Archbishop Pericle Felici, who had also been appointed to the powerful post of General Secretary of the Central Preparatory Commission, the TOC, like the commissions charged with developing the Council's preparatory texts and rules, included a significant number of curial officials and European cardinals and bishops.¹⁶ Indeed, while members of the ten commissions came from across the globe, approximately seventy percent hailed from European countries.¹⁷ Given the TOC's

¹⁴ Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI*, 297.

¹⁵ Carlo Falconi, *Pope John and the Ecumenical Council: A Diary of the Second Vatican Council, September-December 1962*, trans. Muriel Grindrod (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1964), 45-54. For more on the different commissions and their work in the years leading up to the opening of Vatican II, see Joseph A. Komonchak, “The Struggle for the Council During the Preparation of Vatican II (1960-1962),” in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 1, 167-356. For Giuseppe Siri's involvement in, and views on, the Council, see: Marco Doldi, *Il Cardinale Giuseppe Siri e il Vaticano II: L'impegno per il rinnovamento della Chiesa* (Siena: Edizioni Cantagalli, 2016); Nicola Buonasorte, *Siri: Tradizione e Novecento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006); Giuseppe Siri, *La giovinezza della Chiesa: Testimonianze, documenti e studi sul Concilio Vaticano II* (Pisa: Giardini Editori e Stampatori, 1983). For more on Ernesto Ruffini's life and work, see Angelo Romano, *Ernesto Ruffini* (Sciascia: Caltanissetta, 2002) and Giuseppe Petralia, *Il Cardinale Ernesto Ruffini, Arcivescovo di Palermo* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1989).

¹⁶ In addition to Archbishop Felici and three undersecretaries, the Technical and Organizational Commission included nine cardinals, four of whom were in the Roman Curia, four others who were the head of European dioceses (including Giovanni Battista Montini, the future Pope Paul VI), and Francis Spellman of New York (Klaus Wittstadt, “On the Eve of the Second Vatican Council (July 1- October 10, 1962),” in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 1, 479-480).

¹⁷ Daniel-Rops, *The Second Vatican Council*, 112. Daniel-Rops suggests that the high percentage of Europeans was due “chiefly for practical reasons, but also perhaps by reason of competency.”

composition, it is not surprising the commission sought to design a Council hall that would affirm the status quo within the Church by reflecting and prescribing a hierarchical structure of social relations.¹⁸

The Technical and Organizational Commission originally considered the Cortile della Pigna and the Pius XII Auditorium as sites to hold the Council's general congregations, with St. Peter's Basilica to serve as the site for more religiously significant occasions.¹⁹ John XXIII ultimately decided, however, to hold all official Council gatherings in the basilica.²⁰ In their designing of a seating plan, members of the TOC had, according to one critical reporter of the Council, taken "insistent care in distinguishing, and even separating, the Fathers from each other according to the criteria of rank established by the notoriously punctilious protocol of the Roman Church's legal and caste system."²¹ Position within the hall and the type of seat one occupied was designed to reflect each Council father's level of prestige and power within the Church. Most importantly, every seat had to have an unobstructed view of the papal throne, which for most congregations occupied a space between the *Confessio* (the tomb of St. Peter) and the papal altar.²² By placing the table for the cardinals who would serve as the Council's presidents in front of the *Confessio* and papal throne, members of the TOC sought to remind Council fathers that while they, when gathered together in assembly, held a great deal of decision-making power within the Church, the fathers nonetheless remained "subordinate to the approval of the monarch

¹⁸ For an analysis of the spatial significance of the layout of the Assembly Room in the Pennsylvania State House and the rules designed for the U.S. Constitutional Convention, see Richard Beeman, *Plain, Honest Men: The Making of the American Constitution* (New York: Random House, 2009), 58-85.

¹⁹ For Vatican I, Council fathers met in the transept of St. Peter's. The only other ecumenical Councils (out of the previous nineteen) held in Rome were the five Lateran Councils, which met in 1123, 1139, 1179, 1215, and 1512-1517 at the Lateran Palace.

²⁰ Wittstadt, "On the Eve of the Second Vatican Council," in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 1, 480.

²¹ Falconi, *Pope John*, 107-108.

²² Wittstadt, "On the Eve of the Second Vatican Council," in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 1, 481. The commission's original sketch of the Council hall's layout positioned the papal throne over the tomb of St. Peter, but John XXIII insisted that the steps to the tomb remain visible. The throne was on wheels and thus could be moved when the pope used the papal altar (Falconi, *Pope John*, 107).

[the pope].²³ The central location of the president's table also provided the cardinals who sat there with visual control over the actions of all the Council fathers within the hall.²⁴

Between May 15 and October 10 of 1962, St. Peter's underwent a substantial and expensive architectural renovation in preparation for the Council. Workers routed nearly two hundred miles of electrical cables connecting forty-two floodlights, thirty-seven microphones, ninety-two loudspeakers, telephones, television cameras, and a punch-card computing system. They also constructed three first-aid stations, sixteen lavatories, two catering stations, communication and recording centers, and security areas within the basilica.²⁵ According to the TOC's seating plan, Council fathers were to sit in nearly 2,500 numbered seats located in ten or more rows on each side of the basilica's central nave.²⁶ Separated by an aisle over eighteen feet wide, the seats ran nearly the entire length of the nave between the basilica's vestibule and the papal altar. Archways to the side naves were walled off to create a more contained and secure hall, which allowed the rest of the basilica to remain open to visitors when the Council's

²³ Falconi, *Pope John*, 107.

²⁴ The Pope could also listen to the activity of the general congregations from his private office via radio circuit (Falconi, *Pope John*, 307-308).

²⁵ Preparations also included the restoration of the basilica's floor, portico, and ceiling, as well as the repositioning of Michelangelo's Pietà and the improvement of other Vatican buildings. For additional detail about the physical renovations of St. Peter's Basilica, see Wittstadt, "On the Eve of the Second Vatican Council," in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 1, 479-492. While the Vatican did not release an official total cost for the Council and its preparations, various estimates by observers and participants placed the price of the physical renovations to St. Peter's between 950,000 and 1,250,000 dollars and the cost of the entire Council between 25 and 33 million dollars (In 1962 dollars). This total included the daily costs for approximately 8,000 individuals (including Council fathers and their associates), travel expenses to and from Rome for each session, the price of travel, lodging, and renovations during the preparation period, and other miscellaneous costs. Even though the Vatican financially supported nearly 3,000 fathers and their associates who faced financial difficulties, it ultimately managed to pay for the Council thanks in large part to collections donated by the faithful and the willingness of some episcopal conferences to donate funds and pay their contingent's own expenses (Wittstadt, "On the Eve of the Second Vatican Council," in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 1, 497-499). John Moorman, an Anglican bishop and observer at the Council, wryly noted that the cost to the Vatican was nearly \$200 per minute, but that "the cost to the *Church* was much greater than that" (John Moorman, *Vatican Observed: An Anglican Impression of Vatican II* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967), 12 footnote1).

²⁶ Preparations for the seating of Council fathers reflected Vatican officials' assumption that some eligible to attend would not be able to do so. Thus, seating assignments were not finalized until after the first meeting of each session (Wittstadt, "On the Eve of the Second Vatican Council," in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 1, 486-487).

congregations were not in session.²⁷ Closing the side naves also enabled workers to build six elevated tribunes that would hold additional Council fathers in the two closest to the front and the *periti*, theological experts who served individual bishops, groups of fathers, or who were appointed as Conciliar advisors, in the four towards the back of the hall.

According to the seating plan devised by the TOC, cardinals would sit closest to the chairman's table on the left side of the nave (if one was facing the papal altar) in arm chairs that included book stands and kneeling stools covered in red cloth. The TOC placed Eastern patriarchs, the head bishops of Eastern Catholic Churches, in a subordinate position to the cardinals by locating them slightly further away from the chairman's table on the left side and making their seats indistinguishable from the other Council fathers except for the presence of green cloth. This spatial and symbolic distinction led to one of the Council's first conflicts, when Maximos IV Sayegh, Melkite Patriarch of Antioch, refused to attend the Council's opening ceremony. He did so out of anger for what he deemed a deliberate attempt by the TOC to represent the Roman Church as the only real Catholic Church.²⁸ Given John XXIII's desire to use the Council as a way to create dialogue with the world, this early and public clash highlighted the difficulties, passions, and struggles that would mark the work of the fathers in all future sessions.

For Council fathers who were archbishops and bishops, seniority superseded geographical, linguistic, cultural, and ideological concerns in determining their position within the Council hall. The most senior fathers, based on their date of consecration, sat nearest the

²⁷ Wittstadt, "On the Eve of the Second Vatican Council," in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 1, 491.

²⁸ Andrea Riccardi, "The Tumultuous Opening Days of the Council," in *History of Vatican II*, eds. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (English version), vol. 2, *The Formation of the Council's Identity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), and Falconi, *Pope John*, 108-110. Patriarchs were given more prominence in seating during the Council's second session, although they still had to share the same entrances and exits with archbishops and bishops, instead of using the entrance and exit reserved for cardinals (Robert McAfee Brown, *Observer in Rome: A Protestant Report on the Vatican Council* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1964), 68 and Falconi, *Pope John*, 110).

chairman's table in green upholstered folding seats with swinging writing boards and folding kneelers.²⁹ The most junior Council fathers, who were seated closest to the vestibule, had a more difficult time following what was happening at the front of the hall. Thus, the TOC plan spatially reinforced the lack of power newer Council fathers held in the Church by placing them farthest from the chairman's table, which the TOC hoped would remain the sole site of authority within the hall.³⁰

The TOC seating plan created situations like during the Council's first session, when Bishop Robert E. Tracy of Baton Rouge sat in a row with bishops from the Dominican Republic, Canada, the United States (Brooklyn), Syria, and Nigeria.³¹ Depending on their ability to speak Latin or other shared languages, the seating plan meant that fathers might be unable to converse with their neighbors. During the second session of Vatican II in the fall of 1963, Rock Caporale, S.J., interviewed Council fathers and other participants. Caporale's sociological study includes a brief section on the languages spoken by Council fathers. Based on his interviews, Caporale found that Latin American, African, and some European (Spanish, Belgian, Polish, Portuguese, Yugoslav, and German) bishops spoke three or more languages while American, British, Canadian, and Australian bishops primarily spoke their native language and perhaps one other language. Caporale does note that he primarily interviewed "better educated bishops" and thus his averages might be a bit high. Finally, Caporale states, based on his informal study, that "the

²⁹ Wittstadt, "On the Eve of the Second Vatican Council," in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 1, 482. Fathers were alternately assigned places on the right and left of the hall. Bishop Tracy of Baton Rouge describes how the day before the first session opened he had the "occasion to try out a seat at the Council 'for size'... [and] found it roomy and comfortable and cleverly arranged" (Tracy, *American Bishop*, 20-21).

³⁰ Conversely, non-Catholic observers and lay Catholic auditors were situated in tribunes overlooking the chairman's table and papal altar and thus had prime seats to witness the action in the Council hall. Members of the media (print, radio, and television) occupied tribunes located behind the chairman's table and papal altar.

³¹ Tracy, *American Bishop*, 50.

respondents, as a totality, knew Latin,” but this conclusion is contradicted by evidence discussed later in this chapter.³²

The possibility of linguistic barriers meant fathers might be limited in discussing and debating issues with their neighbors in the Council hall. As a result of the TOC’s seating plan, many Council fathers sought out alternate spaces of discussion, both within and outside of the Council hall.³³ In the years between John XXIII’s announcement and the opening of the first session in October 1962, members of the Roman Curia dominated planning efforts for the upcoming Council. The tide would turn, however, once the Council began. Beginning with the first general congregation, the Council hall would become a site of fierce contestation over theological issues, approaches to a dynamic modern society, and potential changes within the Church. These clashes altered not just the course of Vatican II, but also the future for individual Catholics and the institutional Church.

3. Clashes in the Council Hall

During the four sessions of the Council, cardinals, bishops, *periti*, and other participants actively and passively resisted efforts by some in the Roman Curia and their allies to restrict discussion of certain topics and limit the influence of those not aligned with the traditional sources of power in the Church. Those interested in creating a space for dialogue about the issues facing the Church employed a variety of methods, such as refusing to speak in Latin, leaving their assigned seats to assemble and discuss topics in alternative spaces, distributing pamphlets, delivering fiery speeches, and applauding particular speakers and ideas. Opponents sought to condemn these initiatives by depicting them as not only violations of Council rules but also the sacred space of

³² Rock Caporale, S.J., *Vatican II: Last of the Councils* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, Inc., 1964), 147-150.

³³ These alternate spaces will be discussed later in this chapter.

the basilica. In the late 1960s, many in the Church hierarchy levied similar critiques against Catholics involved in the protests within and occupations of churches.

One of the first flashpoints that erupted after the Council began involved a basic issue that was fundamental to the operation of the Council: which languages would be used by fathers during the general congregations. The significance of this issue exceeded mere operational concerns for anyone interested in discerning the direction and impact of the Council. For those Catholics hoping that Vatican II would truly realize John XXIII's call for *aggiornamento*, the embrace of everyday languages spoken by faithful around the world would represent the beginning of a positive and new chapter in the universal Church. For these Catholics, an insistence on the use of Latin, a language disconnected from the reality of the majority of the faithful, would signal that the Council might only result in the reinforcing of current traditions and practices, leaving the Church a bastion of elitism and parochialism. Conversely, for those Catholics who hoped the Council would not result in a significant directional change from the past, the adoption of any language besides Latin would represent the realization of their darkest fears.

In preparation for Vatican II, Church officials had rejected the pleas of many bishops and *periti* and decided Latin would remain the only language spoken during the Council's general congregations and that simultaneous translation would not be provided to the fathers.³⁴ On February 22, 1962, John XXIII confirmed the primacy of Latin as the "only universal but also immutable" language that upheld the dignity of the Church.³⁵ While Church officials required Latin to be used in the general congregations, they allowed other languages to be used during meetings of the Council's commissions, which were also considered official acts of the

³⁴ Riccardi, "The Tumultuous Opening Days of the Council," in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 2, 47.

³⁵ *Veterum sapientia (On the Promotion of the Study of Latin)*,
<http://www.papalencyclicals.net/John23/j23veterum.htm>.

Council.³⁶ While Council fathers were prohibited from relying on simultaneous translation of speeches, the Secretariat for Cristian Unity provided non-Catholic observers present in the Council hall with translation services for both written texts and oral speeches.³⁷ In his diary of the Council, the French author and journalist of the daily *Le Monde* Henri Fesquet unfavorably compared the lack of simultaneous translation at Vatican II to the willingness of other international assemblies such as the World Council of Churches to employ such services.³⁸

Once the Council began, it was obvious to many participants and observers in the Council hall that “hundreds of bishops [hadn’t] a clue about what goes on at the sessions.”³⁹ The varied accents of fathers from around the world complicated comprehension even for those whose ability to understand spoken Latin was excellent.⁴⁰ According to Bishop Robert E. Tracy of Baton Rouge, who admitted he “could understand the general trend of an address but often missed the specifics and precisions involved,” four variations of Latin were commonly heard in the Council hall: French, German, American, and Italian.⁴¹ As Rock Caporale observed, based on his interviews with many bishops and cardinals, few Council fathers “understood the Italian and Spanish bishops, because they spoke too rapidly, or the Americans because of their phonetics.”⁴²

The strict reliance on Latin not only increased the frustration for those struggling to grasp the

³⁶ The transcripts of the commissions had to be immediately translated into Latin (Riccardi, “The Tumultuous Opening Days of the Council,” in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 2, 47).

³⁷ Xavier Rynne, *Vatican Council II* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 50; Brown, *Observer in Rome*, 21; Moorman, *Vatican Observed*, 20-22.

³⁸ Henri Fesquet, *The Drama of Vatican II: The Ecumenical Council, June, 1962-December, 1965*, trans. Bernard Murchland (New York: Random House, 1967), 4.

³⁹ Brown, *Observer in Rome*, 101. Brown maintains that for every father who was honest about their ignorance of Latin, there were at least a few more who remained silent. For additional accounts of Council fathers struggling with Latin, see: Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 59-60; Falconi, *Pope John*, 236-237; Bernard Wall and Barbara Wall, *Thaw at the Vatican: An Account of Session Two of Vatican II* (London: Victor Gollancz LTD, 1964), 34-35.

⁴⁰ Bishop Donal Lamont, in his recollection of the Council, portrays a different situation, stating that with each new day, fathers “[found] the Latin easier and [were] able to identify the different accents of those who had the temerity to submit an intervention and speak in the Aula” (Donal Lamont O. Carm, “*Ad Gentes: A Missionary Bishop Remembers*,” in *Vatican II by those who were there*, ed. Alberic Stacpoole (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986), 272).

⁴¹ Tracy, *American Bishop*, 86-87.

⁴² Caporale, *Vatican II*, 106.

content of complex theological speeches, but also hindered the ability of some fathers, especially those missionary bishops who had not spent a great deal of time in Vatican City, to improvise during their speeches. Observers of the Council pointed out the clash over the language used in the general congregations had significant ramifications for the atmosphere in the hall and level of participation by Council fathers, as well as the content of the debates, the resulting documents, and most importantly, how the Council would engage with the non-Catholic world. As Francis X. Murphy, a Redemptorist chaplain and theology professor who reported on the Council under the pseudonym Xavier Rynne, suggested:

The question of the use of Latin [both in the Council and in the liturgy] became a sort of shibboleth, separating into two camps those who were determined to bring the vast teaching and experience of the Church to bear on problems raised by the modern world; and those who were equally determined to restrain the Church's thinking and liturgical practice within the narrow confines of a western juridically-orientated tradition.⁴³

Andrea Riccardi, a historian of the Catholic Church, social justice activist, and politician, has similarly argued the insistence on Latin as the Council's official language "signified the choice of a mentality" that feared the consequences for the Church if it accepted anything modern, even vernacular languages.⁴⁴

The Church hierarchy's decision to keep Latin as the sole language of the Council's general congregations resulted in an early scandal when Cardinal Richard Cushing of Boston left the first session in November 1962, only a few weeks after it had begun. News of Cushing's early return to the United States fueled debate on the use of Latin among Council participants and within the media. While some participants and observers saw his departure as a "polemical and definitive act," others merely applauded his honesty and his desire to return to Boston where he could be more productive. After Cushing's departure, rumors circulated throughout Rome that

⁴³ Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 61. Throughout this chapter, I will refer to Francis X. Murphy as Xavier Rynne as that was the name he used when publishing his accounts during and after the Council.

⁴⁴ Riccardi, "The Tumultuous Opening Days of the Council," in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 2, 47.

he had personally offered John XXIII the funds to pay for simultaneous translation for all Council participants.⁴⁵ In another popular rumor about Cushing, he had reportedly started to speak in English at a preparatory meeting before the Council and had been quickly quieted by Archbishop Felice.⁴⁶ In an interview conducted after the conclusion of the first session, Cushing admitted the use of Latin in the general congregations was the main reason, although not the only one, for his departure:

I have been an administrator all my life, ever since shortly after ordination to the priesthood, when I was assigned to the Propagation of the Faith office in Boston. I had never sat through lectures in Latin of any kind in my life. I can tell you that I wasn't the only one at the Council who had a problem with the Latin, but it was especially distressing for me. The acoustics were fine; the amplifying system was the most perfect one that I have ever heard anywhere. But such a variety of accents concealed the words from me! Well, after a few weeks of sitting through a bewildering barrage of sound, I was a pretty frustrated man... If they were going to go about the task of *aggiornamento* in Latin, I might as well be at home, I thought, where so many other things I could do were going undone.⁴⁷

In his interview, Cushing verified he had offered to cover the costs of installing a simultaneous translation system in the Council hall. He also declared he would be returning to Rome later that year for the opening of the second session.⁴⁸

Latin did not remain the sole language spoken in the Council hall during the first session. Several Melkite fathers, including Maximos IV Sayegh, Bishop Joseph Malouf, and Bishop George Selim Hakim, refused to speak in Latin and delivered their speeches during general

⁴⁵ Falconi, *Pope John*, 237; Brown, *Observer in Rome*, 101-02; Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 59-60; Moorman, *Vatican Observed*, 21-22. Moorman quotes what Cushing told him about the use of Latin: "I've never been properly educated. I never was taught Lat'n properly at school. I was at Boston in World War One an' we never learnt any Lat'n there. So I can't understand a word these guys say. I jus' have to look intelligent an' get someone afterwards to tell me what it's all about." Falconi and Brown, an Italian and an American, are much kinder in their portrayal of Cushing's abilities than is the Englishman Moorman. Brown also notes a conversation he had with an unnamed bishop who hoped that if simultaneous translation was possible, he could turn a dial and listen to French, German, English, and music.

⁴⁶ Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 60.

⁴⁷ Walter M. Abbott, S.J., *Twelve Council Fathers* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1963), 144-145.

⁴⁸ Abbot, *Twelve Council Fathers*, 145.

congregations in French.⁴⁹ During a discussion of the liturgy on September 23, 1962, Maximos IV Sayegh began his speech by thanking his fellow Patriarchs before the Cardinals in attendance, a snub in protocol that did not go unnoticed by the other fathers in attendance. The Patriarch of Antioch then explained he would only use French for his speeches since it was a more universal language given that the Eastern Church did not recognize Latin as the only official tongue. In a powerful moment, Maximos declared that “the Latin language is dead; but the Church remains alive; and language, the instrument of grace and the Holy Spirit, must be truly alive, because it is for men and not just angels.” The Patriarch concluded his speech with two recommendations, that each regional episcopal conference choose whether vernacular languages should be used in the liturgy and that a simultaneous translation system be installed in the Council Hall so all fathers could actively engage in the discussions.⁵⁰ Unlike many of the fathers in attendance in the Council Hall, Maximos IV Sayegh was immune to political and social pressure applied by members of the Curia and other cardinals and bishops hoping to reaffirm the status quo in the Church. His speech in French demonstrated that all the work done by the preparatory commissions, and the rules agreed upon, would not be easily carried out. He could give voice to those fathers who were hoping for a more comprehensive embrace of the modern world and a robust renewal in the Church.

The public departure of Cardinal Cushing from the Rome and the refusal of the Eastern Patriarchs to speak in Latin during general congregations embarrassed the Church. Beyond these

⁴⁹ Riccardi, “The Tumultuous Opening Days of the Council,” in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 2, 49; Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 60; Falconi, *Pope John*, 211. Brown notes that Maximos continued to defy the regulations of the Council by addressing the fathers in French, although he had offered during the first session to speak in Aramaic (Brown, *Observer in Rome*, 54).

⁵⁰ Maximos IV, *Discorsi di Massimo IV al Concilio: Discorsi e note del Patriarca Massimo IV e dei vescovi della sua Chiesa al Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II* (Bologna: Edizioni dehoniane, 1968), 73-74 and Neophytos Edelby, *Il Vaticano II nel Diario di un Vescovo Arabo*, trans. Riccardo Cannelli (Milano: San Paolo, 1996), 76. For more discussion of this debate and the speech by Maximos IV Sayegh, see Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 60-61 and Tracy, *American Bishop*, 46-48.

public-relations nightmares, even the most traditionalist of Council fathers soon realized a steadfast insistence on Latin as the only language of the general congregations would prevent the completion of even the simplest tasks. Thus, announcements broadcast in Latin were subsequently translated into numerous languages, including Spanish, Italian, French, English, German, and Arabic, as a way to help fathers understand the procedures of the congregations.⁵¹

Council fathers and other participants and observers soon realized the excitement of the initial days and weeks of the first session would not last once “the machinery of the Council slipped into gear and the real work began.”⁵² After the first few hours of each general congregation, when the freshness of the day’s topic had subsided, many participants abandoned their assigned seats in the Council hall for the livelier atmosphere of two coffee bars located within St. Peter’s.⁵³ During the renovation of the basilica in preparation for the Council, one bar had been constructed on each side of the hall. The smaller of the two, on the right side of the basilica as one faces the papal throne, was connected to the Chapel of the Blessed Sacraments. As the Council got underway, fathers unofficially named it “Bar-Jonah” as a pun on the Hebrew reference to St. Peter (Bar Jonah means son of Jonas in Aramaic, which was the name of St. Peter’s father according to the gospels). The second, larger bar on the opposite side of the hall, labeled “Bar-Rabbas,” was located closest to the cardinals’ seats between the choir chapel and the sacristy. One non-Catholic observer wryly noted that the naming of the bar cardinals most

⁵¹ Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 60.

⁵² Lamont, “*Ad Gentes*,” 270. Of course, Bishop Lamont believed that the work of the Council would be completed before the end of the year. Similarly, Moorman realized that the “fun [began] to wear off” when participants realized “there were no new experiences to look forward to.” Moorman is describing his sentiments as the Council’s third session began. This dark mood is contrasted by his positive remembrances of the first and second sessions, which were “new and exciting” and tackled significant issues (Moorman, *Vatican Observed*, 110-111).

⁵³ According to Xavier Rynne, one French bishop was overheard in one of the bars declaring that “to be a good Council Father, you need the patience of Job and the wisdom of Solomon, and it also helps if you have a cast-iron bottom, *alors!*” (Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 163). Rock Caporale, S.J. noted that fathers would often stay in the hall if a popular bishop was speaking, but would often flee to the bars if “some conservative bishops rise to speak” (Caporale, *Vatican II*, 104).

frequently visited after the criminal who was slated to be crucified with Jesus but was spared in accordance with a Passover custom was “presumed to have some veiled symbolism behind it.”⁵⁴

The bars, which served coffee, tea, other non-alcoholic drinks, and snacks, were places where Council fathers, *periti*, lay auditors, and non-Catholic observers could mingle and engage in friendly discussion, debates, and politicking within the confines of St. Peter’s Basilica. As Bishop Robert E. Tracy of Baton Rouge remarked, “democracy held sway” in the bars and “coffee became one of the finest signs of unity” among the Council participants.⁵⁵ The bars provided a space for participants to escape their assigned seats, move freely (at least as much as possible given the crowded conditions), and associate with others on a more egalitarian basis, thus circumventing the TOC’s attempt to inscribe each individual’s level of prestige within the Church and their proximity to power in the layout of the hall. Unlike in the hall, where regulations demanded that Council fathers and others present remain submissive listeners held captive by a single voice at a microphone, in the bars participants could see, hear, and respond to each other in a more intimate and dynamic environment.⁵⁶ The bars quickly became so crowded, noisy, and smoky they were deemed by some to be the site of a “secondary Council” that promised to be more informative and productive than the activity taking place in the Council

⁵⁴ Brown, *Observer in Rome*, 30. A third bar was also hastily built during the third session, this one for Catholic female auditors who had been invited to the Council. Leary of men and women coming into physical contact in the crowded conditions of Bar-Jonah or Bar-Rabbas, Church officials installed the bar, which came to be known as “Bar-Nun,” under the monument of Pope Clement XIII behind the basilica’s main altar. While a few men occasionally visited Bar-Nun, the women found the near-complete segregation “regrettable because it narrowed the opportunities...to communicate their ideas” and put them at a disadvantage compared to male Catholic lay auditors and even male non-Christian observers. Nevertheless, women auditors had the opportunity to share their concerns and discuss important issues with other Council participants during encounters in the spaces between their tribune and the bar, through their participation on the Council’s commissions, where they were the equals of male members, and in their role as lecturers and conference panelists at gatherings around Rome (Carmel McEnroy, *Guests in Their Own House: The Women of Vatican II* (New York: A Crossroad Publication, 1996), 101-103).

⁵⁵ Tracy, *American Bishop*, 51.

⁵⁶ Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), 17 and 52-66.

hall.⁵⁷ By the fourth and last session of the Council in 1965, so many fathers would leave their seats soon after congregations began that the “noise from conversations in the side-aisles of St. Peter’s [would] drown out the voice of the speaker” and those presiding over the congregation would have to make public appeals for silence.⁵⁸ Due to the popularity of the bars, Council moderators would often send staff to herd fathers back into the Council hall to submit their votes.⁵⁹

The importance of the bars as places of free, open, and egalitarian dialogue was confirmed by the measures enacted by those opposed to such discussions and spaces. At the beginning of the third session in September 1964, Archbishop Pericle Felici, the Secretary General of the Council and a member of what was considered by many observers to be a minority of fathers opposed to reform, announced the bars would not open until eleven o’clock in the morning, later than in the previous two sessions. In his dispatches from the Council, Xavier Rynne suggests it was clear to many participants and journalists that this seemingly minor announcement was an attack meant to limit open discussion of certain sensitive themes.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Henri Picher, as cited in Wittstadt, “On the Eve of the Second Vatican Council,” in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 1, 490. See also Brown, *Observer in Rome*, 94. Brown describes a particularly representative experience in Bar-Jonah during the second session: “As I contemplate these masses of celibate bishops packed into this tiny coffee bar with their flowing garments and intricate lace finery, all smoking at a furious rate to the infinite peril of their flowing garments and intricate lace finery, and as I contemplate the comparatively fireproof raiment of the married observers who have no lace flapping from their sleeves, and as I further contemplate what would happen if a fire broke out here, I am led to a new appreciation of St. Paul’s statement that it is better to marry than to burn” (Brown, *Observer in Rome*, 165-66). Xavier Rynne also notes that John XXIII, discussing the issue of smoking before the Council, remarked “if we do not let them smoke somewhere they’ll be hiding their cigarettes under their mitres” (Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, x).

⁵⁸ Christophe Theobald, “The Church Under the Word of God,” in *History of Vatican II*, eds. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (English version), vol. 5, *The Council and the Transition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 322 (ff216). See also Caporale, *Vatican II*, 104.

⁵⁹ Wall and Wall, *Thaw at the Vatican*, 35.

⁶⁰ Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 293-294. The opening time of the bars during the first two sessions varies in the diaries and histories of the Council. While Rynne and Bishop Tracy note that it was 10 am, Robert Brown, in his journal of the second session, states that they opened at 10:30 am (Tracy, *American Bishop*, 157 and Brown, *Observer in Rome*, 30). Both John Moorman and Klaus Wittstadt list the opening time at 11 am (Moorman, *Vatican Observed*, 24 and Wittstadt, “On the Eve of the Second Vatican Council,” in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 1, 490). However, this later time seems unlikely given Archbishop Felici’s announcement during the third session and the rather negative response it incited among the Council fathers.

Conversely, Bishop Robert E. Tracy attributed this change in procedure to a desire to speed up the business of the Council.⁶¹

Council participants' desire to socialize with each other at bars and other spaces in St. Peter's liberated them from the attempted imposition of order and subservience projected by the hall's layout and the procedures governing the general congregations' activity. Confronted by instructions to sit, isolated from others who spoke the same language or shared similar views in seats assigned by rank, and asked to passively submit in silence to the voices of various speakers, many Council fathers, non-Catholic observers, *periti*, and lay Catholic auditors resisted with their feet. They sought to voice their concerns in places where they could discuss pressing issues with individuals in small groups. The freedom to discuss topics in these smaller groups, whether in the bars of the Council hall or in other sites around Rome, often influenced the tenor and content of the speeches given during the congregations as well as the decisions made by Council fathers.⁶²

Throughout the four sessions of Vatican II, Council fathers were the targets of intense lobbying intended to sway their views and votes on issues under discussion in general congregations. Participants in these informational campaigns included partisan outsiders, theologians and *periti*, and the Council fathers themselves. Many of these efforts influenced the atmosphere in the Council hall during general congregations, the ultimate composition of Council documents, and the environment in which the Council documents were received. These efforts at lobbying, especially by Council participants, is often overlooked in the histories written of the Council. Yet these struggles are crucial to understanding the legacies of Vatican II,

⁶¹ Tracy, *American Bishop*, 157.

⁶² George Bull, *Vatican Politics at the Second Vatican Council, 1962-5* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 95.

including how Catholics in the late 1960s adopted similar strategies of protest during occupations of churches and cathedrals.

One of the first pamphlet battles of the Council occurred during the initial debate on the draft of “On the Sources of Revelation” (*Dei Verbum*) in November of 1962. The text of this brief constitution, which had been prepared by the Doctrinal Preparatory Commission under the leadership of Cardinal Ottaviani, outlined the Church’s positions on revelation, tradition, and scripture.⁶³ Ottaviani and his fellow cardinals in the Curia hoped quick acceptance of the text would defeat a growing consensus in the Church around the view that the Bible was the sole source of revelation and tradition, while remaining the authentic theological interpretation of the Scripture, did not create new revelation. When introduced in the general congregation, the text of the constitution aroused fierce resistance from many Council fathers.⁶⁴ A group of cardinals from northern Europe, including the Bishops of France and Germany, circulated a counter-text drafted in part by theologians Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger (the future Pope Benedict). The dissemination of this text sparked a highly-public and fierce pamphlet battle among members of two theological institutes in Rome that left Council fathers caught in the crossfire.⁶⁵ After a passionate debate, over 1,300 Council fathers voted to withdraw the text of the constitution. While this number did not constitute the two-thirds majority required to officially withdraw the draft, John XXIII used his own authority to withdraw the text and send it to a reformulated commission for further revision.⁶⁶

⁶³ Adrian Hastings, *A Concise Guide to the Documents of the Second Vatican Council*, vol. 1 (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1968), 149-151.

⁶⁴ Tracy, *American Bishop*, 71-77.

⁶⁵ For more on the issues at stake for these theological institutes, see Falconi, *Pope John*, 245-253.

⁶⁶ Hastings, *Concise Guide*, 150-151. A second draft was completed in 1963 and written comments were sought from Council fathers. Another version of the constitution was discussed during the third session of the Council and Pope Paul promulgated it on November 18, 1965 (during the fourth session).

At the beginning of the first session, a “clandestine organization” disseminated a scurrilous text to Council fathers, titled *Plot against the Church (Complotto contro la Chiesa)*, which claimed a coalition of Jews, Masons, and Communists were behind efforts in the Council to destroy the Church by making it more open to modern society. The cover of the book included a red triangle, the points of which represented Jews, Masons, and Communists, overlaid on an image of St. Peter’s Basilica.⁶⁷ Finally, during debate on the Church’s stance towards Jews, as part of the “Declaration on Non-Christian Religions” in October 1965, a deluge of literature, including a pamphlet supposedly signed by numerous Catholic organizations and claiming the declaration condemned Christ, overwhelmed Council fathers. The signatures on the pamphlet were later revealed to be forgeries. However, during this heated debate, Church officials received an anonymous letter written in French and German vowing to bomb St. Peter’s if Council fathers voted on the declaration. Such a threat could not be taken lightly, especially since St. Peter’s Basilica had been the target of explosive devices in July and September of 1962, just months before the opening of the Council’s first session.⁶⁸

While ideological outsiders often attempted to persuade Council fathers to vote in certain ways, some of the most heated incidents of lobbying were waged by Council participants. Throughout the four sessions of Vatican II, national and supranational bodies of Council fathers published documents detailing their views on certain issues under discussion in the general

⁶⁷ Falconi, *Pope John*, 314-315. See also Wall and Wall, *Thaw at the Vatican*, 21-22.

⁶⁸ Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 530. On July 13th a small explosion near the altar damaged the statue of Clement X (Wittstadt, “On the Eve of the Second Vatican Council,” in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 1, 491). On September 21st a workman carrying out renovations discovered, and later destroyed, a sack containing a bottle filled with hydrochloric acid and a detonator. According to Carlo Falconi, an ex-priest and frequent contributor to Italian newspapers and magazines on issues related to Catholicism, three theories as to the culprits of the attempted bombings were popular within the Vatican: a radical right-wing organization frustrated with the Church hierarchy’s favorable view towards Italy’s Center-Left government, a crazed Protestant angered by the ecumenical nature of the Council, or a bitter or former priest protesting against the tight-fisted and tyrannical rule of Church officials. Of these three options, Falconi considered the first to be the most likely. If these rumors were true and Vatican officials, or at least a faction of the hierarchy, were considering these three groups as the possible attackers, it provides a window into the worldview of the Church at the time (Falconi, *Pope John*, 84-87).

congregations. During the first session, the episcopates of India and Japan, as well as Council fathers from Africa, all argued for a decrease in the amount of Latin spoken in liturgical celebrations. As Carlo Falconi noted at the time, expressions such as these were considered by many to be a “perfectly normal procedure” that “evoked no protest.”⁶⁹

Yet other efforts to influence the votes of Council fathers were met by public and angry denunciations from high-ranking members of the Church hierarchy, especially when those attempts were carried out by *periti*, the theological experts present at the Council. On several occasions, members of the Curia denounced *periti* for distributing drafts of schemata and other texts to Council fathers. In November 1962, Cardinal Ottaviani introduced the text “On the Sources of Revelation” for discussion by Council fathers. During his remarks, Ottaviani criticized documents that had been circulated by groups of French, German, and Dutch theologians for several weeks as being both contradictory and unofficial. Attempting to remind *periti* and Council fathers of their position within the power structure of the Church, the cardinal reminded Council participants they only had the right to propose amendments to the schema presented on behalf of John XXIII, not propose different schema drafts.⁷⁰ Nearly a year later, during the Council’s second session, Ottaviani once again condemned the lobbying efforts of *periti*. In this case, the Secretary for the Holy Office criticized three particular theologians for their attempts to lobby Council fathers on behalf of a married diaconate. According to Xavier Rynne, Ottaviani declared conciliar thinking to be the realm of the Council fathers, not the *periti*, who should refrain from any task not explicitly assigned to them by a bishop or cardinal. In his

⁶⁹ Falconi, *Pope John*, 244-245.

⁷⁰ Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 76-77.

account of the situation, Rynne identified the three *periti* in question as Karl Rahner, Gustave Martelet, and the future Pope Benedict, Joseph Ratzinger.⁷¹

Two of the most spectacular incidents of lobbying occurred during the Council's second session. As Council fathers climbed the steps of St. Peter's on the morning of November 25, 1963, they were handed a leaflet signed by twenty-five relatively unknown bishops and archbishops urging a vote against the Mass Media schema, *Inter Mirifica*, considered by many participants and scholars to be the weakest and least important text to emerge from the Council.⁷² Originally discussed and accepted in principle during the first session, a much-shortened draft came up for a vote in November 1963, although many Council fathers felt it still retained too much of its original negative language and didn't deserve to be a Conciliar decree.⁷³ When Archbishop Pericle Felici, the Council's general secretary, learned of the pamphleteering occurring on the steps of the basilica, he confronted the priest circulating the text and demanded he be given the pamphlets. When the priest refused, Felici left to seek out the Vatican police. During his absence, a German bishop from Mainz took over the task of distributing the pamphlets. Felici soon returned with several members of the Vatican police and insisted the bishop hand over the remaining pamphlets. In a final attempt to stop the bishop, Felici lunged at him and tried to snatch the pamphlets.⁷⁴ During the general congregation that morning, the acting

⁷¹ Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 196-197.

⁷² Wall and Wall, *Thaw at the Vatican*, 158-160.

⁷³ Hastings, *Concise Guide*, vol. 2, 88-94. According to Hastings, if Council fathers had waited until the third or fourth session of Vatican II, the likelihood of this schema being accepted as a stand-alone document would have decreased significantly.

⁷⁴ Brown, *Observer in Rome*, 205-206; Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 248-249; Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI*, 360. There is some question as to the identity of the German bishop. Brown does not identify the bishop, while Bishop Thomas Holland suggests it was Hermann Volk, the Bishop of Mainz. Alternately, both Rynne and Peter Hebblethwaite contend it was the auxiliary bishop of Mainz, Joseph Maria Reuss. As for the number of signatories of the pamphlet, Brown claims there were 26 signatures while Rynne states there were 25 (24 bishops and 1 head of a religious order in Europe). In his description of this moment, Holland questions whether the literature being distributed was "seditious." He also suggests that those who agreed with the sentiments outlined in the pamphlets did so because "the experience of years of occupation must have predisposed younger minds towards a very existentialist view of

head of the Cardinal-presidents condemned the act of pamphleteering as a “tactic ‘unworthy’” of the Council. Later in the assembly, Felici announced that one of the signers of the petition had demanded his name be removed as it was supposedly used without permission. To some observers, Felici’s announcement represented a desperate attempt to discredit not only the act of pamphleteering, but the cause it was advocating, the rejection of the schema. Although the Mass Media schema ultimately passed 1598 to 503, the number of Council fathers opposed to it increased significantly from an earlier unofficial tally of 103.⁷⁵ This nearly five-fold increase in votes against the schema may have been largely due to the content and tone of the document. As Cardinal John Heenan, the Archbishop of Westminster, later noted, *Inter Mirifica* was “one of the poorest documents ever to have emerged from an Ecumenical Council.”⁷⁶ However, some Council fathers may have changed their votes as a way to protest against the actions of officials like Felici.

For some Council fathers, denunciations of pamphleteering and *periti* by Felici, Ottaviani, and other members of the Curia reeked of hypocrisy since no similar criticism had been publicly declared when Father Carlo Balić, a specialist in Mariology and a subordinate of Ottaviani in the Holy Office, had distributed pamphlets supporting a separate schema for the Virgin Mary to fathers in the Council hall in October 1963. This occurred after Felici announced at the beginning of the second session that no one was allowed to circulate texts within the Council hall without first gaining the permission of the presidents.⁷⁷ In regards to this discrepancy in the views towards pamphleteering, Peter Hebblethwaite has noted “pressure groups were not equal, the playing-field was clearly not even and the umpire or referee (Paul saw

faith and life within Church and State” (Thomas Holland, “The Council Comes of Age,” in *Vatican II by those who were there*, 60).

⁷⁵ Brown, *Observer in Rome*, 208-210 and Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 248-249.

⁷⁶ As quoted in Hastings, *Concise Guide*, vol. 2, 89.

⁷⁷ Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 175.

himself in this role) rarely blew the whistle.”⁷⁸ According to Xavier Rynne, many Council participants believed Balić had been acting on behalf of one or more high-ranking Church officials since the pamphlets were printed by the same Vatican Press as the official schemata voted on by Council fathers and were also classified as *sub secreto*. Leaflets were also distributed on the steps of St. Peter’s basilica and through the mail as part of an “extraordinary and intensive propaganda barrage” designed to increase support for a separate schema on the Virgin Mary, instead of including the discussion in a chapter in *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.⁷⁹

The pamphleteering of Council fathers may not have significantly impacted votes on certain texts, but the action did increase the exposure of varying viewpoints and contributed to what one historian of the Council has described as the “revolution in communications that took place among the Fathers of the Council (between themselves, with progressive theologians and prelates, and with the outside world) and, simultaneously, the development of a rudimentary but effective sense of group solidarity” that impacted actions in congregations.⁸⁰ Contemporary chroniclers of the Council and later historians have discussed the importance of the many bishops’ conferences and unofficial groups of like-minded participants that met regularly to discuss ideas under discussion in the general congregations.⁸¹ Pamphleteering, however, served as a more radical, direct, and egalitarian act of communication available to anyone in the Church, regardless of their position or authority. *Periti* of diverse ideological and theological positions

⁷⁸ Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI*, 360.

⁷⁹ Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 212; Moorman, *Vatican Observed*, 73; Wilde, *Vatican II*, 105-106. Bishop Robert E. Tracy of Baton Rouge described receiving at his hotel “daily mimeographed messages” advocating for a separate schema for the Virgin Mary (Tracy, *American Bishop*, 140-141).

⁸⁰ Bull, *Vatican Politics*, 95.

⁸¹ Bull, *Vatican Politics*, 96-99 and Caporale, *Vatican II*, 71-75.

and bishops who lacked access to traditional sources of power in the Church used pamphleteering as a way to introduce new topics into Conciliar conversations.

While many of the Council's congregations tended to be long and draining exercises in frustration for many participants, raucous bursts of applause, tense confrontations, and polemical speeches punctuated some assemblies. Fierce clashes were not unique to the Second Vatican Council. As Xavier Rynne noted in his journal of the Council, "not one of the Ecumenical Councils—not excluding the latest—was convened without a clash of ideas (even, on occasion, of fists), as a result of which theologians and prelates got hurt, some finding themselves unceremoniously ushered into schism or heresy."⁸² Indeed, during the first period of the Council of Trent (from 1545-1547), a physical confrontation erupted between Bishop Tommaso Sanfelice and Bishop Dionisio de Zanettini when the latter called the former a fool. Sanfelice grabbed de Zanettini by his beard and shook him before the two were separated by other bishops. Church officials confined Sanfelice to a convent for a week for his action.⁸³ While bishops and cardinals, *periti*, and observers did not come to blows during the Second Vatican Council, the significance of the clashes that did occur should not be underestimated. These moments of discord influenced both the dynamics within the Council hall and, in some crucial incidents, the direction of the Council.⁸⁴

During the first congregation on October 14, 1962, French, German, and other national episcopates maneuvered to postpone a vote on the members of the Council's ten commissions. Lists of the commissions had been drafted in advance by members of the Curia, who assumed

⁸² Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 24.

⁸³ John W. O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2013), 109.

⁸⁴ Giuseppe Alberigo, "Transition to a New Age," in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 5, 616.

the majority of fathers would agree to be bound by them.⁸⁵ In response to the announcement of the voting, French Cardinal Achille Liénart, a member of the Board of Presidency who would be a leading voice for reform at the Council, asked Cardinal Eugène Tisserant, the president in charge for the day, permission to speak. After being refused, Liénart grabbed a microphone and asked for a postponement of the congregation so Council fathers could familiarize themselves with the candidates and compose alternate lists. When German Cardinal and Archbishop of Cologne Josef Frings' seconded Liénart's motion, a wave of thunderous applause swept the Council hall. A visibly-embarrassed Tisserant postponed the vote for three days and adjourned the general congregation, shocking many of the fathers in the hall.⁸⁶ With their intervention and applause, Liénart, Frings, and the fathers who supported them signaled the majority of the Council's participants would not passively accept the plans proposed for, and documents drafted by, the Curia-dominated preparatory commissions.⁸⁷ Bishop Robert E. Tracy described Liénart's "gambit" as one with "lasting and signal importance" since it demonstrated that "every bishop who was interested could plan an active role in the proceedings."⁸⁸ In her study of Vatican II, Melissa Wilde has argued the waves of applause that followed Liénart and Frings' motion during the first congregation represented a "ritual which easily aligned 'everyone present with the newly posited ultimate source of power'—the Council."⁸⁹ Officials in the Curia and their ideological supporters recognized the importance, and danger, this spontaneous eruption of applause posed to their plans for the Council. After the congregation's adjournment, Cardinal Giuseppe Siri, the

⁸⁵ Falconi, *Pope John*, 159 and Moorman, *Vatican Observed*, 39.

⁸⁶ Falconi, *Pope John*, 159-161; Edelby, *Il Vaticano II*, 52; Riccardi, "The Tumultuous Opening Days of the Council," in *History of Vatican II*, vol. 2, 27-32; Melissa J. Wilde, *Vatican II: A Sociological Analysis of Religious Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 18.

⁸⁷ Bull, *Vatican Politics*, 95.

⁸⁸ Tracy, *American Bishop*, 32-35.

⁸⁹ William Sewell, as quoted by Wilde, *Vatican II*, 18. Wilde extends William Sewell's argument regarding the storming of the Bastille to the Council. Sewell contends that such examples of collective action make it difficult for resistance to "be forcefully repressed, ignored, or explained away" (William Sewell, "Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille," *Theory and Society* 25, no.6 (1996): 843).

Archbishop of Genoa and the President of the Italian Episcopal Conference, met with Ottaviani in the Holy Office to plan against future attacks guided by what they considered to be dislike for the Curia based in regional jealousy of those based in Rome.⁹⁰

While Liénart and Frings had planned their interjections months in advance as part of a plan by ideologically-progressive bishops to resist efforts by the Curia, the applause they received was spontaneous.⁹¹ This reaction by the overwhelming majority of the Council fathers represented one of the only ways they could respond given the guidelines initiated by the Curia-dominated preparatory commissions. Throughout the four sessions of the Council, only about ten percent of Council fathers spoke on the floor of the hall during a general congregation.⁹² As Rock Caporale assessed during the second session, most Council fathers felt there should be “some opportunity for ‘real’ debate” where they could exchange ideas and dissect the drafts of proposed documents. Instead, potential speakers had to submit a written statement three days before their planned speech, which meant that most discussions were nothing more than a series of lengthy and irrelevant monologues.⁹³ After the second session, moderators attempted to speed up the discussions within the Council hall by requiring summaries of speeches to be submitted five days in advance and to require potential speakers to present on behalf of a least five other Council fathers.⁹⁴ Such changes made the likelihood of a real debate erupting on the floor of the Council hall even less likely. These new changes also meant that “many good ideas were lost” to

⁹⁰ John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 98.

⁹¹ Wilde, *Vatican II*, 19.

⁹² Bull, *Vatican Politics*, 95.

⁹³ Caporale, *Vatican II*, 101-102. As Giuseppe Alberigo has argued, there was a lack of places where important themes of the Council could be discussed in a more direct manner with each other, *periti*, and others. In comparison, at the Council of Trent, fathers met with specialists in different theological areas to engage in discussions and debates before sessions of the council (Alberigo, *A Brief History*, 65).

⁹⁴ Alberigo, *A Brief History*, 64.

the demand of efficiency.⁹⁵ Suspicion about the legitimacy of the process for deciding the list of speakers for each general congregation also existed throughout Rome and further tainted the atmosphere within the Council hall.⁹⁶ Council fathers who did have the opportunity to speak during a general congregation were at the mercy of the moderators, who could, and did, interrupt speeches and shut off microphones if a speaker exceeded their time limit or, in some cases, if they believed the speech was off-topic or in violation of some rule.⁹⁷ Thus, with their applause, Council participants influenced how others in the hall heard speeches and used it as an effective and direct method of registering their support or displeasure with specific issues, texts, and speakers.⁹⁸

During the first two sessions of Vatican II, the audience within the Council hall helped shape the “field of action” by “aligning themselves” to speakers of varying ideological and theological persuasions with applause.⁹⁹ Early in the Council, on October 30, 1962, Cardinal Bernardus Alfrink, the Archbishop of Utrecht, clashed with Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani. Responding to numerous recent speeches in favor of making multiple changes to the mass, Ottaviani, in his remarks, asked “Are these Fathers planning a revolution?” Ottaviani argued too many changes to the celebration of the mass would confuse the faithful and diminish its sacred nature. He also claimed only a vocal minority of Council fathers actually were in favor of such radical modifications. After Ottaviani had exceeded the ten-minute time limit by several minutes,

⁹⁵ Tracy, *American Bishop*, 157-158.

⁹⁶ Xavier Rynne remarked that “when there was need for the conservative bloc to reply on the floor to some intervention which they considered particularly dangerous or outrageous, it was noted that they had little difficulty in sandwiching in their speakers at the last minute” (Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 186).

⁹⁷ Lamont, “*Ad Gentes*,” in *Vatican II by those who were there*, 279; Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 75; Tracy, *American Bishop*, 37-38.

⁹⁸ For more on the ways in which audiences have agency, see the following: Gregory S. Aldrete, *Gestures and Acclamations in Ancient Rome* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Paul McIlvenny, “Heckling in Hyde Park: Verbal Audience Participation in Popular Public Discourse,” *Language in Society* 25, no. 1 (March 1996): 27-60; Erving Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981); and Charles Goodwin, “Audience Diversity, Participation, and Interpretation,” *Text* 6, no. 3 (1986): 283-316.

⁹⁹ Goodwin, “Audience Diversity,” 297.

Cardinal Alfrink, the member of the Council of Presidents presiding that day, interjected and instructed Ottaviani to conclude his remarks immediately and sit down. Loud applause followed Alfrink's directive. Xavier Rynne attributed this applause to the Council fathers' "displeasure with the tenor of [the] speech."¹⁰⁰ Ottaviani did not attend another general congregation until November 14. Multiple observers and chroniclers of the Council attributed this absence to Ottaviani's annoyance at being made to look a "*brutta figura*."¹⁰¹ During Ottaviani's absence, rumors and jokes spread throughout Rome. According to one story, the cardinal had hailed a taxi after the confrontation and when asked his destination, he accidentally responded Trent, a reference to the Council of Trent held in the sixteenth century as part of a Catholic Reformation that reified Church doctrines.¹⁰² As Carlo Falconi noted in his journal of the Council, jokes such as these reflected not just the combative spirit that had quickly gripped the Council hall but also a system where "certain personalities at the Council are no longer regarded merely as themselves and as individuals but have come to be looked on as symbols and treated as such."¹⁰³ While Falconi felt Ottaviani's reputation was too harsh and slightly unearned, he agreed that no Cardinal better represented the conservative and entrenched Curia. For many Council participants and interested parties following the events of the Council through the media, Ottaviani stood in the way of updating the Church and opening it to the modern world.

Less than two weeks after the Alfrink/Ottaviani clash, as it quickly became known in Rome, members of the Curia attempted to restrain the spontaneous outbursts of applause in the Council hall that were becoming more common. On November 10, Cardinal Ernesto Ruffini, the Archbishop of Palermo and presiding Council President for that general congregation, advised

¹⁰⁰ Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 68-69.

¹⁰¹ Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 68-69 and Moorman, *Vatican Observed*, 44-45.

¹⁰² Moorman, *Vatican Observed*, 45.

¹⁰³ Falconi, *Pope John*, 228-233.

Council participants, especially those furthest from the front of the hall, they had to stop applauding speakers as a participatory method of support or disagreement. Ruffini asked that all speakers be treated respectfully, including those in the Curia “who know much and live holy lives.”¹⁰⁴ Such a request demonstrated the fear of many in the Church’s bureaucracy for the direction of the Council and a concern regarding their ability to shape it going forward. Ruffini’s request also served as a desperate plea to reinforce what he and others deemed to be traditional customs and behavior. Yet Ruffini and those in the Curia who opposed the opening of the Council to the possibility of transformational change failed to recognize they were in a dynamic moment in the Church’s history. Now that they were assembled in Rome, many Council fathers were less likely to give Curial officials the respect they thought they deserved. In his Council diary, Neophytos Edelby, a Melkite bishop from Aleppo (Syria) and the principal advisor to Maximos IV Sayegh, disagreed with Ruffini’s interpretation of the situation. Edelby claimed “the members of the Curia have attacked the Council fathers much more than they have been attacked by them.”¹⁰⁵ By the end of the first session, sociologist Melissa Wilde has argued “the Curia now found that no one was listening at all, and even worse, some were explicitly questioning their authority to speak.”¹⁰⁶

If members of the Curia and their allies had hoped for a chance to reestablish order in the hall with the beginning of the Council’s second session, they were quickly disabused of this notion by the actions of many Council participants. On October 11, a young Italian bishop, Giuseppe Bettazzi, delivered his first speech in the Council. In his report of the speech, Xavier Rynne indicated the majority of Council fathers approved heartily of the speech with applause. Rynne believed the applause occurred in part due to this being the bishop’s maiden speech, as

¹⁰⁴ Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 75.

¹⁰⁵ Edelby, *Il Vaticano II*, 98-99.

¹⁰⁶ Wilde, *Vatican II*, 26.

well as his succinct, bold, and humorous delivery. Moreover, he suggested that some fathers considered the ability of this young bishop to give a speech endorsing the collegiality of bishops meant that the conservative nature of the Italian episcopate may have been changing. However, as Rynne notes, in the next congregation a group of conservative Italian bishops critically argued against many of the points made by their junior member.¹⁰⁷

Council participants of all ideological and theological viewpoints employed applause to demonstrate their support for certain issues, speeches, and speakers. On November 8, 1963, Ottaviani was once again involved in another confrontation in the Council hall that would be remembered for many years to come. During continued debate on the issue of collegiality, the relationship between the bishops and the pope, Cardinal Josef Frings, the Archbishop of Cologne, levelled a blistering attack against the Curia, especially the Holy Office (previously known as the Congregation of the Roman and Universal Inquisition and presently known as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) claiming their “methods and behavior do not conform at all to the modern era, and are a cause of scandal to the world.”¹⁰⁸ At the end of this comment, many in the hall began to applaud loudly. As Robert Brown, a Protestant observer present at the second session, remarked in his account, this was the first time applause had interrupted a speech.¹⁰⁹ Once the applause had stopped, Frings continued with his comments, ultimately concluding with a call for the reform of the Curia. Many in the Council hall greeted the end of Frings’ speech with another healthy round of applause.¹¹⁰ The third speaker to follow Frings was a visibly angry Ottaviani, the head of the Holy Office. Before launching into his

¹⁰⁷ Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 185-186. See also Alberigo, *A Brief History*, 44.

¹⁰⁸ As quoted in Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 221. Joseph Ratzinger, the future leader of the Congregation of the Doctrine for the Faith and Pope Benedict, played a significant role in drafting Frings’ speech (O’Malley, *What Happened*, 192). For an American perspective on this debate, see Tracy, *American Bishop*, 112-119.

¹⁰⁹ Brown, *Observer in Rome*, 151.

¹¹⁰ Brown, *Observer in Rome*, 151 and Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 222.

prepared remarks, Ottaviani responded to Frings' comments about the Holy Office by claiming they were actually an attack on the pope, who presides over the Congregation. This comment was met with some applause from the front of the hall, where the most senior bishops and cardinals sat. Ottaviani continued to challenge other points made by Frings. No one applauded when his speech concluded.¹¹¹ However, many Council fathers took the opportunity to depart the hall for the aisles and coffee-bars to rehash one of the few actual debates that had occurred so far in the Council.¹¹² In their retellings of this clash of esteemed cardinals, observers relied on violent imagery. Bishop Robert E. Tracy recounted how a fellow father sitting nearby left the hall during Ottaviani's speech because he couldn't "stand the sight of blood!"¹¹³ Brown described the day as one where "the dome of St. Peter's was blown sky-high."¹¹⁴ Rynne explained "word of the fireworks in St. Peter's" quickly spread throughout Rome, making both Frings and Ottaviani desirable targets of the media.¹¹⁵ The applause for both Frings and Ottaviani revealed a variety of entrenched positions of Council fathers concerning not just certain pivotal issues, such as the governing structure of the Church, but, as historian John O'Malley has argued, "the fundamental issue in the council—*how* the church was to operate in the future."¹¹⁶ The applause also displayed the bitterness these different groups could feel towards each other. Throughout the rest of the second session, a tense atmosphere reigned inside and outside of the Council hall.

¹¹¹ Brown, *Observer in Rome*, 152-153. See also: Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 223; Wall and Wall, *Thaw at the Vatican*, 91-94; Edelby, *Il Vaticano II*, 202-206.

¹¹² Wall and Wall, *Thaw at the Vatican*, 92-94.

¹¹³ Tracy, *American Bishop*, 143-144. Tracy remarks how when he later visited the coffee bar, he witnessed Frings and Ottaviani "chatting and smiling and embracing each other at the entrance to the bar."

¹¹⁴ Brown, *Observer in Rome*, 150.

¹¹⁵ Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 225-226. Rynne includes discussion about a report that claimed Pope Paul VI called Frings to offer his support of his speech and another disputed report that Ottaviani had met with the pope and offered to resign when he did not receive similar support.

¹¹⁶ O'Malley, *What Happened*, 193.

If the first session of the Council was marked by “a series of refusals,” when bishops and cardinals from around the world chose to challenge the plans of the Curia-dominated preparatory commissions in order to pursue the spirit of *aggiornamento* and ecumenism proposed by John XXIII, the second session began under a cloud of uncertainty.¹¹⁷ Not only did Council fathers not know how many additional sessions would be necessary, they were waiting to see how Paul VI would approach both the operations and objectives of the Council. Members of the Curia and their allies took advantage of this moment to launch a counteroffensive against those seeking significant changes to how the Church interacted with the world. Bishop Robert E. Tracy noted that at the end of the second session many participants felt “that something was missing... [and] too much time has simply been wasted.”¹¹⁸ By the beginning of the third session in the fall of 1964, one observer noted a growing consensus among Council participants that “two big forces were coming to grips and that this was not just a clash of opinions but of policies and even of moralities.”¹¹⁹

As one of the foremost historians of the Council, Giuseppe Alberigo, has argued, the third session was by far the most “tempestuous and combative.”¹²⁰ The day before the opening of the session, a small group of cardinals (mostly from within the Curia, including some notable champions of Opus Dei), bishops, and major superiors sent a letter to Paul VI in which they fiercely attacked the idea of collegiality found within *Lumen Gentium*. According to Paul VI’s biographer, this right-wing broadside alarmed the pope.¹²¹ Once the session began, Council participants engaged in a contentious discussion of the issue of collegiality and how the Church should be structured. While a majority of Council fathers were in favor of approving the revised

¹¹⁷ Moorman, *Vatican Observed*, 61.

¹¹⁸ Tracy, *American Bishop*, 152.

¹¹⁹ Moorman, *Vatican Observed*, 111-112.

¹²⁰ Alberigo, *A Brief History*, 91.

¹²¹ Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI*, 384-387.

text, a powerful minority had been working behind the scenes to have the issue removed, or at least reopened to debate.¹²² Council participants had also tackled two controversial declarations: *On Religious Liberty*, which had significant ramifications for how the Church would relate to foreign powers in the future, and *On the Jews and Non-Christians*, which involved the issue of deicide.¹²³ In mid-October, it appeared that Paul VI expressed his desire to have a new draft of *On Religious Liberty* written by a working group that included some notable critics of the text. The pope also seemed to bow to intense external pressure and proposed that the topics covered in *On the Jews* be included in *Lumen Gentium* and not be a stand-alone declaration. As news of the pope's interventions spread throughout Rome, many bishops and cardinals wrote individual and group letters to Paul VI asking him to follow the Council's normal procedures and to not discount the views of the overwhelming majority of Council fathers. Ultimately, neither of the actions seemingly desired by the pope occurred. Nonetheless, the situation increased the tense and uncertain atmosphere among Council fathers.¹²⁴

Perhaps no moment better illustrates the efforts made by Council fathers to combat the limitations placed on them to discuss, debate, and vote on issues of importance than the chaos that erupted in St. Peter's on "Black Thursday" during the last week of the third session in November 1964. The week had begun on a disconcerting note for many Council fathers when on Monday morning General Secretary Felici introduced a "Preliminary Explanatory Note" (*Nota Praevia*) to *Lumen Gentium*, which dictated how the issue of collegiality would be interpreted and implemented and explained that the papal primacy would remain unaltered. While the note

¹²² O'Malley, *What Happened*, 206-211.

¹²³ For more on the history and content of these declarations, see Hastings, *Concise Guide*, vol. 1, 195-203 and Hastings, *Concise Guide*, vol. 2, 75-86. For a discussion of the key speeches given during this debate of the text *On Religious Liberty*, see Tracy, *American Bishop*, 158-161.

¹²⁴ For a more detailed discussion of the events during the first part of the third session, see O'Malley, *What Happened*, 211-226.

persuaded most of the issue's critics to vote for the schema, it stirred up resentment among the majority of Council fathers who had been in support of the text and the strong position it took in favor of collegiality.¹²⁵ According to the Melkite bishop Neophytos Edelby, the *Nota* struck many Council fathers as “an excessive attenuation of the doctrine of collegiality.”¹²⁶ As Peter Hebblethwaite has noted, the emphasis placed on the *Nota* “was putting the cart before the horse with a vengeance.”¹²⁷ A further shock came on Thursday morning when Felici alerted Council fathers the final text of the decree *On Ecumenism* was not ready as nineteen changes had been requested from a “higher authority.” Xavier Rynne argued there was little doubt that these suggested changes had come from Paul VI and they were not ones that could be ignored.¹²⁸

Later in the day, Cardinal Tisserant, speaking on behalf of the Council of Presidents, announced the vote on the schema *On Religious Liberty* would be postponed until the fourth session so the revised text could be reviewed by the Council fathers.¹²⁹ As Xavier Rynne noted, Tisserant's comment was met by weak applause from those critical of the schema, which was quickly “drowned out by a wave of grumbling, protests, and commotion which spread throughout the hall.” Hundreds of Council fathers, including some of the moderators and Council Presidents, left their seats to talk with each other in small groups, turning the hall into a

¹²⁵ O' Malley, *What Happened*, 244-245. For a comprehensive analysis of the entire “Black Week” of Vatican II, see Luis Antonio G. Tagle, “The ‘Black Week’ of Vatican II (November 14-21 1964),” in *History of Vatican II*, eds. Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (English version), vol. 4, *Church as Communion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 388-452.

¹²⁶ Edelby, *Il Vaticano II*, 284-285. Surprisingly, Edelby makes no mention in his diary of the pandemonium that broke loose on the Thursday of that week when Council fathers learned of the postponement of the vote on the schema *On Religious Liberty* to the fourth session.

¹²⁷ Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI*, 397-398.

¹²⁸ Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 422. According to Rynne, the pope had proposed forty changes to the decree, of which nineteen were accepted by the Secretariat for Non-Christians.

¹²⁹ Wilde, *Vatican II*, 98. In the two days before “Black Thursday,” some Council fathers opposed to the schema sent letters to the Council of Presidents arguing for the postponement, claiming the revisions were so significant the text was basically brand new.

“beehive” of activity.¹³⁰ English observer John Moorman characterized Rynne’s description of the incident as “a bit exaggerated,” but nonetheless agreed that a majority of fathers were “unhappy” with the decision and crowds of fathers and *periti* soon blocked the aisles of the hall.¹³¹ While speeches on that day’s topic continued, nothing proceeded as normal in the Council hall. Paul VI, after watching the scene unfold on closed-circuit television, summoned Secretary General Felici for a meeting. A group of fathers and *periti* quickly drafted a petition to the pope asking him to reverse the decision and allow a vote before the end of the session.¹³² Copies of the petition began to circulate throughout the hall. Later in the general congregation, Bishop Emiel-Jozef de Smedt of Bruges delivered a speech in favor of the schema that was frequently interrupted with loud applause from those shocked by the events of that morning.¹³³ As de Smedt concluded his remarks, a deafening applause “went on and on as if never to end, the longest such ovation in the four years of the council.” Despite this robust show of support for voting on the schema, and although over 1,400 Council fathers signed the petition to Paul VI, the pope expressed his support for the decision at the next general congregation.¹³⁴ Some participants, such as Cardinal Augustin Bea, the President of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, felt the feelings of concern over the last week, while troubling, were “momentary impressions [that] did in fact pass, and the work done in the Council, and in the third session in particular, remains and continues to bear abundant fruit in the Church.”¹³⁵

¹³⁰ Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 418. See also William J. Wolf, “Religious Liberty,” in *The Second Vatican Council: Studies by Eight Anglican Observers*, ed. Bernard C. Pawley (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 175-205. Wolf notes that “on few other points was the confrontation between the conservatives and the progressives so clear, sharp, and decisive” (176).

¹³¹ Moorman, *Vatican Observed*, 133-135.

¹³² Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 419. See also Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI*, 398-401.

¹³³ To read the text of a speech focusing on the issue of Religious Liberty Bishop Emiel-Jozef de Smedt delivered during the Council’s second session, see Hans Küng, Yves Congar, O.P., and Daniel O’Hanlon, S.J. eds., *Council Speeches of Vatican II* (Glen Rock, NJ: Paulist Press, 1964), 237-253.

¹³⁴ O’ Malley, *What Happened*, 241-242.

¹³⁵ Augustin Bea, *Ecumenism in Focus* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1969), 151.

Nonetheless, for many Council fathers, the events of the “Black Week” seemed to deprive the Council of its decision-making power.¹³⁶

While Council participants often resisted efforts to limit their ability to discuss certain issues through methods such as speaking in languages other than Latin, leaving their seats to converse in the bars, pamphleteering, and applauding speeches and decisions, some Council fathers delivered polemical and politically-charged speeches in the Council hall. In her study of Vatican II, sociologist Melissa Wilde identified four groups of bishops, each with their own agenda and motivations. The first two groups both consisted of bishops and cardinals from Europe and North America. While one group sought to block any attempt to reform the Church, the other group desired theological and ecumenical change. The third group of Council fathers, mainly from Latin America, was focused primarily on improving the living conditions of the poor in their countries.¹³⁷ Indeed, as historian Massimo Faggioli has argued in his study of the post-Vatican II era, some Council fathers, particularly those from Latin America, “expressed the need for a theology that was socially more aware and politically more responsible.”¹³⁸ This insistence on aiding those most afflicted by economic injustices was put forth for more than just spiritual reasons. Latin American bishops were concerned about the inroads Marxists and evangelical Protestants had recently made in their communities.¹³⁹

Missionary bishops from Africa and Asia composed Wilde’s fourth group of Council fathers. As Wilde has suggested, these bishops “were progressive on all fronts,” seeking

¹³⁶ Alberigo, *A Brief History*, 76.

¹³⁷ Wilde, *Vatican II*, 32-38. Wilde examines theories of religious competition, institutional legitimacy, and organizational change to explain the formation of these four groups of bishops. For another discussion of the different groups of bishops present at the Council, see Luigi Mezzadri, *I Vescovi al Concilio: Servi della parola e Padri della Fede* (Todi: Tau Editrice, 2015).

¹³⁸ Faggioli, *Vatican II*, 53.

¹³⁹ Wilde, *Vatican II*, 38. For a discussion on how the documents and spirit of the Council were discussed, debated, and implemented in Latin America in the two decades after the end of the fourth session in 1965, see Gustavo Gutiérrez, “The Church and the Poor: A Latin American Perspective,” in *The Reception of Vatican II*, 171-193.

ecumenical, social, and political change.¹⁴⁰ Robert Brown, a Protestant observer present at the second session, argued that missionary bishops and those from Latin America, more than other groups of Council fathers, “decried, in ringing terms, the church’s identification with the rich, with the upper classes, with the external trappings of wealth and pomp and power... [and] called for the church to humble herself, and to identify herself not with the affluent but with the needy, to become a servant even as her Lord was a servant.”¹⁴¹ This attitude towards social justice and economic issues is evident in a speech given by Bishop Joseph Blomjous of Mwanza, Tanzania, when he argued “the Church is not destined simply to save men for heaven but also to humanize man’s social life...and to foster a social order that sins less flagrantly against divine justice....There should be a common Christian confrontation with the modern industrialized world.”¹⁴² Missionary bishops continued to insist the Church hierarchy reexamine its position towards contemporary society throughout the Council. During debate on the text that would become the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), Archbishop Eugene Louis D’Souza of Bhopal, India criticized the reluctance of Church officials in the past to adapt to a changing world:

How many men were lost to the Church and regarded it as an enemy of human liberty and dignity between the time when the American and French Revolutions clarified the notion of liberty and the time when these rights were first mentioned in a papal document?... As if the scandal of Galileo was not enough we have since had the cases of Lamennais, Darwin, Marx, Freud, and more recently Teilhard de Chardin. Their works, not without error, were fighting for the very things that our schema recognizes, and yet their works were indiscriminately condemned.¹⁴³

Fiery speeches that challenged the status quo within the Church , while not the norm, were a regular occurrence throughout the four sessions of Vatican II. In addition to their spoken

¹⁴⁰ Wilde, *Vatican II*, 38.

¹⁴¹ Brown, *Observer in Rome*, 108-109.

¹⁴² Joseph Blomjous, “Ecumenism in Africa: Reflections of a Bishop,” *Ecumenist* 2, no. 2 (1964): 19. See also Walter Abbott’s interview with Cardinal Laurian Rugambwa in Abbott, *Twelve Council Fathers*, 72-83.

¹⁴³ Rynne, *Vatican Council II*, 480-481.

interventions, Council fathers, as well as *periti* and other participants, actively resisted efforts by some in the Roman Curia and their allies to restrict discussion of certain topics and limit the influence of those not aligned with the traditional sources of power in the Church. By leaving their assigned seats to assemble and discuss topics in alternative spaces, distributing pamphlets, using applause to register support or disagreement with certain speakers and ideas, and delivering pointed speeches, many Council participants sought to create a space for dialogue about how the Church could address pressing issues and better adapt to a dynamic societal moment. Those opposed to such goals condemned these initiatives and depicted them as not only violations of Council procedures but also the sacred space of the basilica.

Yet these same individuals employed similar tactics to advance their own, more traditionalist, agendas. They engaged in pamphleteering, submitted petitions to the pope in attempts to subvert certain actions and decisions, delivered withering critiques in the Council hall, attempted to defeat drafts of schema they opposed through the use of *modi* (accepting the document with certain conditions), and labored to change the procedural rules of the Council.¹⁴⁴ Given these conflicts, it is not surprising that many of the Catholics and non-Catholics who participated in, observed, and reported on the Council frequently compared its primary setting, the hall constructed within St. Peter's basilica, to a baseball field, football pitch, tennis court, theater, and battlefield.¹⁴⁵ The most heated exchanges shocked some of the bishops who knew little about the Church and world beyond their archdioceses. As Bishop Sylvester Treinen of Boise remarked, he "was scared after the first session by the open confrontation on the Council floor," yet he eventually began to look forward to the verbal jousting of the general

¹⁴⁴ Wilde, *Vatican II*, 74-78.

¹⁴⁵ For example, see Brown, *Observer in Rome*, 147; Albert C. Outler, "Strangers Within the Gates: An Observer's Memories," in *Vatican II by those who were there*, 174; Fesquet, *The Drama of Vatican II*, 3; Moorman, *Vatican Observed*, 39; Tracy, *American Bishop*, 111.

congregations.¹⁴⁶ As shown above, conflicts among Council participants were fundamental to the experience and course of Vatican II.

4. Conclusion

With the conclusion of the fourth and final session of Vatican II, thousands of fathers, *periti*, official Catholic and non-Catholic observers, and other interested onlookers left Rome and returned to their dioceses and parishes throughout the Catholic world to study the Council's documents and to apply them to their everyday realities. Meanwhile, many of the most stringent critics of the actions taken and decisions made during the Council remained embedded within the Curia and other positions of power throughout the institutional Church.¹⁴⁷ As Daniele Menozzi has argued, these opponents to change “emphasized those passages that the minority had succeeded in introducing into the conciliar documents... while paying lip service to their wording.”¹⁴⁸ Thus, the heated clashes and confrontational positions that marked many general congregations continued to divide the Church in the years and decades following the conclusion of the Council.

This struggle within the Church would reach its peak in the late 1960s, when Catholics interested in discussing and debating issues of concern with their fellow Catholics and those in the Church hierarchy occupied, and protested within, churches and cathedrals throughout the Catholic world. For Catholic protestors, the Second Vatican Council served as a powerful endorsement for a horizontally-structured and more inclusive Church composed of active and knowledgeable believers. They had embraced the new emphasis on dialogue and cooperation put

¹⁴⁶ As quoted in John A. McCoy, *A Still and Quiet Conscience: The Archbishop Who Challenged a Pope, a President, and a Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), 98.

¹⁴⁷ Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI*, 455-457. As Hebblethwaite notes, Paul VI attempted to reform the Holy Office, renamed the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the end of the fourth session, he relied primarily on those within the Congregation to reform themselves.

¹⁴⁸ Daniele Menozzi, “Opposition to the Council (1966-1984),” in *The Reception of Vatican II*, 326.

forth by the Council, as well as what they viewed as a “new style for the exercise of authority... and a new style of thinking, speaking, and behaving.”¹⁴⁹ They evoked their identity as part of the People of God and held their assemblies within churches because of the sacred and communal feelings associated with these buildings. It was this process of refashioning the sacred through their physical presence and attempts at dialogue with Church officials that occupiers of churches in the late 1960s looked to in their efforts to continue the renewal of the Church and the reform of its role in the world. These discussions highlighted the interconnection of religious practices and beliefs and the broader social, economic, and political environments within which the Church was a crucial actor. As I will argue later in this dissertation, the occupation of churches in 1968 and 1969, especially those in Parma and Isolotto, and the heated debates that surrounded these events, should not be viewed as an exception from, or aberration to, the recent history of the Catholic Church. Rather, these protests and occupations should be viewed as a continuation of the process of reform and renewal that gained intensity in the postwar era and was on display during the four sessions of the Second Vatican Council.

¹⁴⁹ O’Malley, *What Happened*, 11.

Chapter III The Second Vatican Councils in Florence

1. Introduction

Cardinal Elia Dalla Costa, archbishop of Florence, died on December 22, 1961. Ordained in 1895, Dalla Costa served as the bishop of Padua for eight years before becoming Florence's archbishop in 1931. A vocal anti-fascist, Dalla Costa famously closed the windows of the episcopal palace and refused to participate in ceremonies with Adolf Hitler during his visit to the city in 1938. Despite gradually relinquishing daily management of the archdiocese to Bishop Ermenegildo Florit between 1954 and 1958, Dalla Costa nonetheless remained a powerful presence within Florentine religious and political circles. Dalla Costa also continued to play an important role within the Church hierarchy and in 1958 participated in the Conclave that elected his friend, Angelo Roncalli, as Pope John XXIII.¹ Most importantly for the purposes of this dissertation, Dalla Costa had served as a mentor for Enzo Mazzi, the parish priest in Isolotto, since he arrived in the community in 1954. Not only did the senior archbishop provide the young priest with guidance, he gave Mazzi the freedom to innovate in regards to religious practice and social norms. Furthermore, Dalla Costa's experience and power in the Church protected and insulated Mazzi from serious criticisms of his ideas and actions.

In March 1962, Ermenegildo Florit succeeded Dalla Costa as archbishop of Florence. Florit was born in 1901 to a peasant family in Fagagna, in the Friuli-Venezia-Giulia region of

¹ For more on Dalla Costa's life and service as archbishop of Florence, see: Foresto Niccolai, ed., *Elia Dalla Costa. Una presenza che dura* (Florence: San Paolo Edizioni, 1989); Giovanni Pallanti, *Elia Dalla Costa. Il Cardinale della carità e del coraggio* (Florence: San Paolo Edizioni, 2012); *Vita e ministero sacerdotale negli scritti del servo di Dio, il Card. Elia Dalla Costa, Arcivescovo di Firenze* (Florence: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1985).

northern Italy. After being ordained as a priest in 1925, Florit primarily served as a Professor of Theology at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome before being appointed the coadjutor archbishop to Dalla Costa in 1954.² Compared to Dalla Costa, Florit lacked the pastoral experience of his predecessor. For some Florentine Catholics, the new archbishop also lacked the common touch of Dalla Costa. In addition to the ideological differences that separated the two bishops, the disparities in their personalities would be highlighted time and time again during the 1960s when Florence faced crises related to worker layoffs, political elections, religious changes, and a deadly flood that paralyzed the city.

Although the confrontation between the faithful of Isolotto and the Florentine Curia gained worldwide attention in the fall of 1968, the foundation of this dispute can be traced back to the pre-conciliar period after Florit's arrival in Florence in 1954. However, it was after Dalla Costa's death and during the years of the Second Vatican Council when the tension between the two parties grew due to clashes over religious practice and the political and social stands taken by the community. At the heart of these clashes were drastically different expectations for, and experiences of, the Council. During the course of the Vatican II years, the Catholics in Isolotto participated in discussions and workshops sponsored by the archdiocese and other religious institutions in Florence that focused on various aspects of the ongoing Council. Like other Florentine Catholics, the laity in Isolotto also had the opportunity to listen to Council fathers from around the world speak about key issues facing the Church when they visited Florence on weekends and during breaks between the sessions of Vatican II.³

² Franco Mariani, *Il Cardinale Ermenegildo Florit: per grazia di Dio e della Sede Apostolica 86* Arcivescovo di Firenze* (Florence: Edizioni Firenze Promuove, 1998).

³ "Un gruppo di padre Conciliari in Palazzo Vecchio: Sulle speranze del mondo e del Concilio," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, October 19, 1962; "La Pira a colloquio con cinque vescovi coreani," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, November 5, 1962; "Un incontro fra padre Conciliari nella nostra città," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, September 27, 1963; "Importante discorso del Card. Suenens a Firenze: Rinnovamento della Chiesa in un mondo che cambia," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, November 30, 1963; "L'Arcivescovo di Zagabria ha parlato ieri a Firenze: La Liturgia è per il

These chances for engagement and discussion during the years of the Council enabled lay Catholics in Isolotto and throughout Florence to reconsider and remap their visions of global Catholicism. The faithful in Isolotto used this expanded understanding of the Church to protest social, political, and economic injustices around the world and to demonstrate their solidarity with oppressed peoples. As they had done in the years preceding the Council, Catholics in Isolotto frequently used the sacred space of Isolotto's church to give legitimacy to their assemblies and protests.

By focusing on the pivotal moments within Isolotto and Florence during the 1960s, and the many different ways in which Catholics interpreted these moments, this chapter argues that Vatican II should not be viewed as a singular entity. Instead, by examining the lived histories of individual laity and groups of Catholics, one can discover the existence of many independent and diverse Councils, even within a single archdiocese.⁴ Just as the faithful in Isolotto had been engaged in innovative religious practices long before the opening of the Council in 1962, they continued to explore what it meant to be Catholic in a new, post-Vatican II Church, in the years after the ending of the Council in 1965. Thus, the experiences of the Catholic community in Isolotto demonstrate that Vatican II was not a monumental rupture in the history of Church. Likewise, the heated atmosphere of the late 1960's was not a break from the events earlier in the decade. Instead, the protests and confrontations of 1968 and 1969 were part of the Council.

2. Archbishop Florit's Council

Ermenegildo Florit became archbishop of Florence seven months before the first session of the Second Vatican Council opened in Rome. While in Rome for the four sessions of Vatican II,

popolo," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, December 1, 1963; "Mons. Giuseppe Slipyi Domenica nella nostra città," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, January 24, 1964.

⁴ For a recent text that explores this approach, see Kathleen Sprows Cummings, Timothy Matovina, and Robert A. Orsi, eds., *Catholics in the Vatican II Era: Local Histories of a Global Event* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

Florit frequently articulated a more traditionalist voice during proceedings.⁵ In between sessions of the Council, the archbishop repeatedly stressed three main themes during the 1960s: unity within the Church and collaboration among Christians, the importance of the role of the laity in the Church, and respect for authority. As archbishop, Florit created opportunities for Florentine Catholics to talk with him, and with each other, about the pressing issues facing the Church and the decrees and constitutions emerging from the Council. Yet, despite his emphasis on dialogue, he never wavered in his view that the laity remained subordinate to Church officials.

Soon after becoming archbishop in March 1962, Florit met with representatives of various Catholic organizations within the archdiocese as well as laity who worked with the Apostolate of the Laity. During his comments to the assembled crowd, the new archbishop emphasized the importance of the relationships the laity should have with their priests and their bishop, declaring lay Catholics to be his “most precious partners.”⁶ Florit reinforced this message later in April during his homily on Holy Thursday. Speaking of the rapid changes buffeting society at the present moment, Florit exhorted those gathered before him to “take advantage of the new situation and to unite together with Christian love, the force that binds the world.”⁷ Throughout the four sessions of the Council, the unity of Catholics would remain a common theme in Florit’s messages to the faithful of Florence.⁸

Shortly before Florit became archbishop, one Catholic priest, Ernesto Balducci, and two influential lay Catholics, Florentine writer Mario Gozzini and the Director of *L’Avvenire d’Italia*

⁵ For more on Florit’s involvement, alliances, and interventions during the Council, see the five-volume history of the Council by Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak (Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, eds., *History of Vatican II* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995-2005).

⁶ “L’incontro dei laici con l’arcivescovo Florit,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, April 1, 1962 and “Monsignor Florit si è incontrato ieri con i rappresentanti delle organizzazioni cattoliche,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, April 2, 1962.

⁷ “Il progresso annulla le distanze i cristiani si facciano promotori di unità,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, April 20, 1962.

⁸ For example, see: “L’arcivescovo esorta i fedeli a pregare per l’unione con i fratelli separate,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, December 25, 1962 and “L’unità dei cristiani è la garanzia della pace,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, April 12, 1963.

Raniero La Valle, participated in a debate in Florence focused on the role of the laity in the Church. While all three agreed on the importance of the laity in the modern Church and the need for them to take action to address pressing issues, they differed on how autonomous the laity should seek to be as they sought change. While Gozzini advocated for more autonomy, both La Valle and Balducci encouraged action within the realms of the mission outlined by Church officials.⁹ A month later, Florentine Catholics engaged in a day-long discussion of the same issues as part of their preparations for the commencement of the Council later that year. The conversation included interventions by leaders of lay Catholic organizations, an archdiocese representative for the Apostolate of the laity, individual lay Catholics, and Florentine mayor Giorgio La Pira. Throughout the day, speakers commented on a variety of themes, including the importance of workers and women in the Church and the value of personal religious experience. At the end of the session, several leaders of lay organizations announced their plan to ask Florit to convene another, and larger, discussion among the laity before the opening of the Council.¹⁰

Later that year, in June, Archbishop Florit convened a meeting to hear from, and talk with, Florentine laity. Over four hundred lay Catholics, many of them representing community groups, crowded into the major seminary that hot summer day. In advance of the meeting, the archdiocese circulated a list of twelve themes they hoped would serve as a guide for discussion. The list included topics such as the laity's hopes for the Council, if "errors of prospective" regarding the Council existed, how to better integrate the faithful into the liturgy, and how the Church should improve the social and economic lives of the faithful.¹¹ The discussion began with Monsignor Giuliano Agresti, who oversaw the apostolate of the laity in Florence, calling on

⁹ "Il ruolo dei laici nella Chiesa," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, March 1, 1962.

¹⁰ "I laici nella Chiesa in un dibattito fra i cattolici fiorentini," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, April 30, 1962.

¹¹ "I laici discutono sul Concilio ecumenico," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, June 25, 1962.

those assembled to “speak of the problems that concern the Council with the spirit of children and with the frankness of those who are loved.”¹²

Over the next four hours, a diverse array of lay Catholics addressed a variety of topics, including some not on the circulated agenda. A professor began by posing questions regarding whether or not the Council would be infallible while in session. He concluded his statement by declaring that the Council “is not just the grand gathering of bishops with the pope, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit; all of the Church is united with them and take part spiritually through their faith.”¹³ After lengthy interventions by a doctor and engineer, a Catholic only identified by his first name briefly discussed two points. First, the lay Catholic argued the Council should not address the issue of Marxism so as to avoid it being seen as a political gathering instead of a religious one. However, he went on to state that it would be good for Council fathers to examine if there were “any points of contact” between “the small portion of truth in Marxist protest against the western world” and the Catholic faith. The second issue the lay Catholic wanted to address was the role of the laity in the Church. Specifically, he argued that lay groups such as Catholic Action needed to undergo reforms, and that overall, lay organizations should not report directly to the bishop, but work with the bishop as if they were partners.¹⁴ A few speakers later, another lay Catholic also addressed the issue of the laity. In this case, he argued the laity should take on more administrative responsibilities within parishes, which would not only alleviate the burdens of many parish priests but also help to break down any barriers that might exist between the priest and the faithful.¹⁵

¹² “Convegno dei laici fiorentini, 23 giugno 1962 al Seminario maggiore,” Istituto Gramsci Toscano, Fondo Mario Gozzini, Parte III—Documenti, 68—Concilio a Firenze—Isolotto—Opera don Facibeni, 1.1, 4.

¹³ “Convegno dei laici fiorentini,” 5-6.

¹⁴ “Convegno dei laici fiorentini,” 13-14.

¹⁵ “Convegno dei laici fiorentini,” 15-16.

During the next intervention, the speaker argued, through a lengthy and detailed theological treatise, for an expanded role for the laity in the liturgy of the Church and for the restoration of the liturgical year.¹⁶ After several Catholics asked Florit to consider the issues of “resting on Sunday” and the inequity of how this is practiced in reality, and the troubles plaguing Italian schools, a Catholic worker stood up and questioned the Church’s dedication to workers.¹⁷ In his comments, the worker declared that most members of the working class were not expecting much from the Council. The Catholic suggested that bishops might “increase the enthusiasm of the working class if the Council actually said something in relation to the problems of the working class.”¹⁸ Following this speech, another worker suggested three practical changes that would make the Church more appealing to the working class: if the language of the liturgy was one that could be understood by all, the “real and concrete inclusion of the laity in the life of the Church,” and allowing those who are married to serve as priests and deacons.¹⁹ The last lay Catholic to address the assembly summarized the points made by several previous speakers regarding the working class and put forth a call for unity. In her comments, she argued that “if there is a struggle for justice it should be a battle not by a particular group or class, but it should be a battle by everyone within the Christian community.”²⁰

At the end of the speeches, Florit addressed the lay Catholics assembled in the hall. He thanked them for their frank and honest comments. While he stated he was unable to address all their concerns, he did want to focus on a few issues that came up repeatedly. Florit assured the lay Catholics that the role of the laity in the Church, their relationship to the hierarchy, and their concrete realities would be a focus of the Council fathers. Florit also expressed confidence that

¹⁶ “Convegno dei laici fiorentini,” 16-22.

¹⁷ “Convegno dei laici fiorentini,” 23-24.

¹⁸ “Convegno dei laici fiorentini,” 24-28.

¹⁹ “Convegno dei laici fiorentini,” 30.

²⁰ “Convegno dei laici fiorentini,” 41.

the Council would address how to incorporate the laity into the liturgy in a more “active and aware” manner. The archbishop reaffirmed the Church’s traditional social doctrine by condemning Marxism as heresy. He went on to declare his opposition to the worker-priest movement in France, instead advocating for more chaplains to be assigned to factories in Florence and throughout Italy. He expressed concerns about the situation with all schools in Italy, Catholic and secular. Finally, Florit addressed the issue of unity among the faithful. The archbishop urged the faithful to understand that “this is truly the time of the laity” and that the Church was not just the pope or the clergy but “all the baptized.”²¹

Media and Catholics alike, both in 1962 and later, declared this discussion with and among the laity to be “without precedent in the history of the Catholic movement” in Italy.²² Yet this was not a one-time initiative within Florence. Florit continued to participate in, and sanction, opportunities for the laity in the archdiocese to engage in discussion about the Council and the challenges facing Catholics. At the beginning of September 1963, less than a month before the beginning of the second session of Vatican II, Florit presided over a meeting of the bishops within Tuscany. At the end of their two-day conference, the bishops called on the laity throughout the province to collaborate with their religious leaders during the Council in whatever way they could.²³ A few weeks later, the Florentine archdiocese organized a second pre-Conciliar assembly for laity to “express in full freedom their observations, preferences, and hopes on the work of the Council.” Like the previous meeting in June 1962, a broad cross-

²¹ “Convegno dei laici fiorentini,” 42-47.

²² “I laici discutono sul Concilio ecumenico,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, June 25, 1962 and Walter M. Abbot, S.J., *Twelve Council Fathers* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), 103. In an interview that took place after the first session of the Council concluded, Florit expressed a desire to make this meeting with the laity a regular occurrence in the archdiocese (Abbot, S.J., *Twelve Council Fathers*, 100).

²³ “I vescovi della Toscana chiedono ai fedeli di collaborare al Concilio,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, September 13, 1963.

section of lay Catholics from Florence spoke on a diverse set of issues, including what had happened, and what did not happen, during the first session of the Council.²⁴

For Archbishop Florit, the unity of the Church and the importance of the laity could not exist without a third, and crucial, concept, obedience to religious authority. While this theme always underscored Florit's comments during the first few years of his tenure, it became more pronounced as the Council progressed, the possibility for tremendous change within the Church became more of a reality, and as protests within all realms of Italian society increased.²⁵ In March 1964, Florit issued a pastoral letter during Lent. According to the archbishop, respect of authority not only served as the foundation for the unity of Catholics and the collegiality among bishops and the pope, it also represented "the bond that assured the security and coexistence of the entire edifice" of the Church.²⁶ After Pope Paul VI issued his first encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam* ("Paths of the Church") in August 1964, Florit commented on the text during a homily as part of the celebration of the Mass during the feast day for the Assumption of Mary. After discussing several of the pope's arguments, Florit stressed that the discussion of ambiguous terms such as renewal "has revealed a tendency, certainly erroneous, to speak of reform of the Church as if it regards change of the fundamental structures desired by Christ."²⁷ During a moderated discussion after the close of the third session of the Council, Florit declared that all those who were baptized could assume the mantle of the People of God, but that the head of the Church remained the pope.²⁸

²⁴ "Domenica l'assemblea pre-conciliare dei laici," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, September 20, 1963 and "L'incontro dell'Arcivescovo con i laici per il Concilio," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, September 23, 1963.

²⁵ For an early example of Florit's views regarding obedience to authority, see "Il senso Cristiano della libertà e dell'autorità nell'omelia di mons. Florit," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, December 16, 1957.

²⁶ "L'unità della Chiesa argomento della 'pastorale' dell'Arcivescovo ai fedeli in occasione della Quaresima," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, March 19, 1964.

²⁷ "Un'omelia dell'Arcivescovo sull'enciclica di Paolo VI," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, August 17, 1964.

²⁸ "Un conversazione di mons. Florit sul Concilio," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, December 20, 1964.

Perhaps no better example of Florit's view on obedience, and those who might reject the authority of religious officials, exists than the comments he made during his Easter homily in April 1965. Florit declared that obedience to authority was not just a "moral obligation required for the proper management of the ecclesiastical community," it represented an "ontological necessity to being a Christian." The archbishop went on to argue that a lack of respect for Church officials was damaging Catholic society. He blamed this crisis on "a weakness of faith" that emerged from the frailties of the human personality.²⁹ The stress Florit placed on unity in the Church and obedience to authority is crucial to understanding how and why he reacted to various religious, social, and political initiatives undertaken by Florentine lay Catholics and some priests during the 1960s. While Florit supported dialogue with and among the lay Catholics in his archdiocese, he believed such conversations had to take place in certain ways. Any group of lay Catholics who attempted to pursue an initiative, regardless of its merits or underlying motivations, outside the proper administrative channels, was likely to be seen by Florit as anti-authoritarian.

3. The Council in Isolotto

Since his arrival in Isolotto in December 1954, Enzo Mazzi had labored to meet the everyday social and physical needs of residents through spiritual endeavors marked by a politics of inclusion. His efforts to radically reimagine the space of the community, particularly the parish church, as well as the actions that occurred within the church, had established the building as the social heart of the community. By the time the Council began in the fall of 1962, many in Isolotto viewed the religious community as a united body of believers in which the clergy and laity were equals. Throughout the 1960s, the community would continue to experiment with religious innovations and would study, discuss, and apply the statements, events, and documents

²⁹ "L'omelia pasquale del Cardinale Arcivescovo," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, April 20, 1965.

of the Council to their everyday realities in Isolotto and Florence. The faithful continued to voice their desires for a Church that served the poorest and most disenfranchised in the world. And in most cases, when the community needed to gather for support or assemble to demonstrate strength, they did so in Isolotto's church.

At the end of 1962, just as the first session of the Council was coming to a close, the faithful of Isolotto rose in defense of the Florence's workers in response to the announcement of a mass termination at the FIVRE (*Fabbrica italiana valvole radio elettriche*) factory. As in the case of the Galileo crisis three years earlier, many of the dismissed workers occupied the factory in an effort to increase public pressure on the company's directors, whom they hoped would repeal or reduce the dismissals. To aid the workers, many of Isolotto's residents, workers, and parishioners formed a committee that organized and provided material and spiritual support during the occupation and crisis, just like they had done to help support the workers of Galileo.³⁰ Yet while the Florentine religious hierarchy publicly and forcefully responded to the dismissals in 1959, it remained noticeably silent in 1962 and 1963 during the FIVRE situation. This change in behavior highlighted the ideological and practical differences that existed between the Florentine Curia under Dalla Costa and the Curia under Florit. In addition, the varied reactions to these crises underscored, for many faithful throughout Florence, how little support they should expect from their archbishop and other religious officials.

In 1959, Cardinal Dalla Costa had publicly intervened on the side of the Galileo workers, urging the company's directors to make humane decisions that reduced suffering to a minimum. Many newspapers and politicians, including Florence's mayor at the time, Giorgio La Pira, publicly praised Dalla Costa for his efforts. Even Florit, the coadjutor archbishop at the time, had appealed to the directors of Galileo "to do what they can... to ensure the continuity of

³⁰ Comunità dell'Isolotto, *Isolotto: 1954-1969* (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1969), 116.

employment for hundreds of workers threatened by dismissal” in his end of the year homily.³¹ Florit had also attempted to lessen the prospects of violence during a protest in the Duomo’s piazza and even reportedly gave a protestor some money to help feed his family.³² The statements and actions of both Dalla Costa and Florit during the Galileo crisis did not stray from the Church’s traditional social doctrine, which supported workers in their struggle for more dignity and expanded rights but at the same time condemned Socialism, Communism, and class warfare.

In 1962, however, Archbishop Florit chose not to issue a public statement regarding either the layoffs or the occupation of the factory. Disturbed by this silence, a group of fifteen Florentine priests, including Mazzi and Gomiti, met to discuss possible avenues of action. After the group drafted a letter addressed to the workers of FIVRE, only five priests signed the text that circulated throughout the archdiocese on January 12, 1963. According to those in Isolotto, intense pressure from Florit and other religious officials dissuaded the other ten priests from signing. All of the participants, including the five priests who signed the letter, received warnings from Florit stating that only he was authorized to make a public declaration.³³

In their letter, the priests used language and expounded upon ideas that were rooted in the social justice tradition of the Catholic Church, especially in regards to their critique of capitalist society. In language similar to what could be found in Pope Leo XIII’s *Rerum Novarum* (“Of

³¹ “Un grazie da Firenze al Cardinal Liénart,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, February 7, 1959.

³² “Ieri a più riprese nel centro di Firenze. Scontri per la Galileo tra dimostranti e polizia,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, January 28, 1959 and “I preti in sacrestia,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, January 30, 1959. In a text published in 1968 that was highly supportive of the actions and statements of Catholics in Isolotto and Parma, a different view of Florit’s behavior during the Galileo crisis is present. The authors draw a stark comparison between the positions of Dalla Costa and Florit by citing a supposed conversation between the two where Dalla Costa, who was seriously ill at the time, told his coadjutor bishop that either he had to go to the occupied factory or the ailing archbishop would go “on a stretcher” (*Da Parma all’Isolotto: Il Cardinale Contestato* (Rome: Edizioni religioni oggi, 1968), 7-8). There is no doubt that the repeated interactions between Florit and the faithful in Isolotto and other parishes throughout Florence between 1959 and 1968 influenced this interpretation of the archbishop’s actions and positions.

³³ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 116-117.

Revolutionary Change”) and Pius XI’s *Quadragesimo Anno* (“On the Fortieth Year”), the priests declared they felt morally and spiritually compelled to “intervene and be with you [the workers] in your just battle.”³⁴ However, they began to dramatically differ from the Church’s position when they expressed their refusal to accept societal norms that allowed poor working conditions, such as low pay, unhygienic environments, and a lack of job security, or a worldview in which “economic laws are sacred and untouchable and that profit is the only or the principal aim of economic activity.” Citing FIVRE’s own economic data, the priests argued that while both the value of the plant and the dividends distributed to shareholders had increased over the years, wages had remained fixed. Adopting language more commonly found in Marxist literature, the priests declared any system “in which capital generates profit and profit multiplies capital, while the condition of the proletariat remains unchanged,” deserved to be condemned by the Church as it had done in regards to the practice of usury in the past.³⁵

Instead of the modern economic order that valued profit and rewarded the minority at the expense of the majority, the priests expressed the need for a more benevolent, classless society in which the focus of the economy was on people. In their conclusion to the letter, the priests reproached the institutional powers of the economic, political, and religious realms of society, stating that “others consider your battle an attack on the constituted order and our words the projects of dreamers... [but] our meeting is the sign of truth because it is the proof of the presence of Christ.” Although the entire letter can be read, in part, as a challenge to Florit’s authoritative demeanor, especially when contrasted with the actions of his predecessor, this last

³⁴ *Rerum Novarum*, May 15, 1891, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/leo13/113rerum.htm> and *Quadragesimo Anno*, May 15, 1931, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius11/p11quadr.htm>.

³⁵ EM Documenti 017/1, “Sac. Borghi Bruno, sac. Gomiti Sergio, sac. Innocenti Renzo, sac. Mazzi Enzo, sac. Rossi Renzo “Agli operai della F.I.V.R.E.,” January 12, 1963.

assertion was the clearest denouncement of the archbishop's silence during the FIVRE crisis and his attempt to muzzle the voices of the priests within the archdiocese.³⁶

Shortly after the resolution of the FIVRE crisis in 1963, Enzo Mazzi and Sergio Gomiti spoke at a meeting of Florentine priests about their preaching practices in the parish of Isolotto. During their address, the priests credited the short but vital tenure of John XXIII for providing a "huge push" and the Council for "consecrating" the importance of the Word of God. They argued that, in their view, the Church "continues a new experience because Christ is for the men of today." Furthermore, they declared the Council and "the whole process of renewal of the Church is a process that must lead to a missionary pastoral approach." Through this new strategy, Isolotto's priests hoped the Church would be better able to reach the poor, oppressed, and disenfranchised. Mazzi and Gomiti argued that too many Catholics responded to preaching with "indifference, superficial attention, endurance, and prevention." Thus, in Isolotto, the priests had "sought to avoid all those methods that might harm a spirit of collaboration and fraternity."³⁷ In the months that followed the meeting of priests, Mazzi received word that Archbishop Florit strongly disapproved of the statements made by Isolotto's priests. Florit's negative reaction to the sentiments expressed by Mazzi and Gomiti did not dissuade them from continuing to speak out on issues they deemed important for the present and future of the Church.

In October 1964, Mazzi, Gomiti, and two other priests publicly responded to a letter sent to all the priests in Florence, and Florit, by Lorenzo Milani and Bruno Borghi. Milani and Borghi were responding to Florit's removal of the rector of the archdiocese's seminary without providing any comments as to the reasons for the change. The two priests cited other issues they had with Florit's past decisions, including his unwillingness to publicly support priests and his

³⁶ EM Documenti 017/1. The letter can also be found in *Isolotto: 1954-1969* (116-119).

³⁷ EM Documenti 020, "Relazione per un convegno di sacerdoti: 'L'annuncio della parola di Dio nella comunità parrocchiale,'" 1963.

lack of desire to have a true conversation with the archdiocese's priests before the Council began. Because of this lack of dialogue, Milani and Borghi argued "the Florentine Church, with its wall between bishops and priests, is now at the margins of the Catholic Church." With their letter, the two priests hoped to increase dialogue with Florit and encouraged all their colleagues to express their admiration for the archbishop through "respectful sincerity and a rejection of the gossip of the sacristy."³⁸ Mazzi, Gomiti, and two other priests, in their letter to Florit, expressed sympathy for their fellow priests' "suffering," but nonetheless disagreed with their suggested solution as well as their characterization of those who were discussing recent actions in the archdiocese. For these four priests, "to overcome the dilemma of silence" all Catholics needed to seek "greater mutual trust not only at the individual level but also at the community level." In their letter, the four priests argued that one possible path forward to increase dialogue and trust was to copy the example of how the Church's bishops interacted with each other at the Council, as a body of equals.³⁹ While Mazzi, Gomiti, and their fellow priests did not critique Florit or his past actions as Milani and Borghi had done, their decision to publicly discuss recent initiatives undertaken by the Florentine Curia did not please the archbishop. In particular, discussions that opposed the traditional hierarchical structure of the Church and deprived the archbishop of his sacramental authority likely attracted significant attention by ecclesiastical officials.

In December 1964, during a conference on Paul VI's recent encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam* ("His Church"), Archbishop Florit called for the "faithful and exact applications" of liturgical reforms approved by the Council.⁴⁰ A few months later, in mid-February, the Florentine archdiocese announced a course of meetings to prepare the faithful for the implementation of

³⁸ "Lettera di don Lorenzo Milani e don Bruno Borghi a tutti i sacerdoti della Diocesi Fiorentina," October 1, 1964, www.barbani.it/opere_i_lettera.html.

³⁹ EM Documenti 022, "Lettera di don Mazzi e altri tre preti a monsignor Florit dopo la lettera di don Milani e don Borghi 'A tutti i sacerdoti dell'arcidiocesi fiorentina'," October 7, 1964.

⁴⁰ "L'insegnamento dell'*Ecclesiam Suam* ricordato a Palazzo Pucci," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, December 21, 1964.

reforms to the liturgy of the Mass set to go into effect on March 7.⁴¹ Two days later, Cardinal Florit celebrated the Mass in Italian within Florence's Duomo.⁴² In Isolotto, the faithful had participated in discussions on the important religious changes emerging from the Council for years. Given the community's history of innovation and experimentation, many Catholics in Isolotto saw the implementation of liturgical reforms approved by Council fathers as an important phase in the development of the community.

Shortly before the initial reforms of the liturgy went into effect in March 1965, a group in Isolotto composed of lay Catholics and the parish priests wrote a treatise that outlined the community's position in regards to the liturgical renewal sanctioned by Vatican II. For them, the work of the Council, especially the Dogmatic Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*), represented a "happy crowning, [and] an effective complement" for the work they had done in the past. Indeed, liturgical reform was "the instrument and the providential occasion for the spread in the parish of the missionary and liturgical spirit and for the awakening of [their] and other's indifference." To accomplish this goal, the group of faithful devised a preliminary program of meetings for six weeks that discussed various themes related to the renewal of the liturgy, such as the need for a new people of God, a desire for a living language for the liturgy, and the importance of active participation of all Christians in the Church.⁴³

On April 7, 1965, the religious community of Isolotto celebrated its first reformed Mass, which was followed by an assembly for discussion. Many parishioners declared their happiness to finally be able to hear and understand parts of the service that had been previously chanted in Latin and in a low voice.⁴⁴ Over the next few years, the priests and faithful of Isolotto continued

⁴¹ "La riforma alla liturgia della Messa," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, February 10, 1965.

⁴² "Messa in italiano ieri in cattedrale," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, February 12, 1965.

⁴³ EMP 0082, "Una liturgia viva esige una lingua e un comportamento che siano vivi," February, 1965.

⁴⁴ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 62.

to enact changes to the liturgy. Ultimately, this experimentation led to conflict with the religious hierarchy in Florence. In May 1967, Archbishop Florit sent a letter to Mazzi reproaching the priest for his “liturgical arbitrariness.” Florit reminded the priest of Article 22 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, which states that “regulation of the sacred liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church, that is, on the Apostolic See and, as laws may determine, on the bishop” and that “no other person, even if he be a priest, may add, remove, or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority.” Arguing that Mazzi’s attitude and actions had begun to inspire other young priests in a negative manner, Florit demanded that any changes or innovations cease no later than June 29.⁴⁵

Mazzi shared Florit’s accusations with a group of parishioners and together they drafted a response. They argued their labor to create a pastoral mission originated from the desire of Dalla Costa to send Mazzi to Isolotto in 1954 and was further supported by the words of John XXIII and the experiences and documents of the Council. The priests and faithful of Isolotto reiterated that they did not want to abuse the sacred nature of the Mass. Rather, they were attempting to make the Church “more alive, more sensible, and more tied to the people.” They expressed concerns that Florit, who they judged to be anxious about the renewal of the Church, had already decided to “suffocate their sincerity” and their communal walk. Finally, the group requested that Florit visit their parish so that he could get to know them and engage with the faithful in dialogue.⁴⁶

In June of 1966, controversy erupted in Florence in the weeks preceding a local administrative election. In a published appeal to voters, the Provincial Council of the Florentine

⁴⁵ EM Documenti 037, “Lettera dell’Arcivescovo Card. Ermenegildo Florit a don Enzo Mazzi su abusi commessi nel rito della S. Messa,” May 18, 1967 and “Fedeltà alla dottrina e rispetto della liturgia in una lettera del Cardinale al clero e ai fedeli,” *L’Avvenire D’Italia*, May 19, 1967. See also *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 62-64.

⁴⁶ EM Documenti 038, “Enzo Mazzi a nome della comunità parrocchiale in risposta alla lettera di Florit su le norme liturgiche,” May 26, 1967 and See also *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 65-69.

Italian Christian Workers' Association (*Associazioni Cristiane dei Laoratori Italiani*—ACLI) hailed the upcoming election as a “moment of considerable importance for the democratic future of Florence” and appealed to Christian workers to vote for candidates on the lists of democratic parties, particularly the Christian Democrats.⁴⁷ The ACLI issued this public call in response to the decision of a sizeable contingent of Catholics, who were sympathetic to and viewed the former Florentine mayor Giorgio La Pira as their ideological leader, to vote for candidates of leftist, even socialist, parties instead of the Christian Democrats, which they viewed as having moved to the right.⁴⁸ In Isolotto, this conflict not only escalated the tension between the faithful and priests within the community and the Florentine Curia, it also exposed the growing rift between the parties to a broader public.

In the days before the election, Enzo Mazzi and several parochial delegates of Isolotto's Civic Committee were invited to attend a meeting in a nearby parish. At the meeting, the president of the Florentine Civic Committee stressed that it was not only a moral imperative for all Catholics to support the Christian Democratic Party in the upcoming election, but also their duty since this was the wish of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. During the discussion that followed, some of the laity from Isolotto raised two issues. First, they wondered how they should view this moral command in light of “their freedom and autonomy in making political choices.” Second, they requested clarification as to how they could vote for candidates of the Christian Democratic Party when the party “presented a clear program of support for the oppressive implementation of economic power and the explicit rejection of those forces that could still create a small opening

⁴⁷ GR 57, “Appello delle ACLI agli elettori,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, June 8, 1966. The ACLI was founded in 1944 in response to Catholic workers participating in the foundation of the Italian General Confederation of Labor (CGIL). While the ACLI maintained close ties to the Christian Democratic Party during the 1940s and 1950s, it moved to the political left in the 1960s.

⁴⁸ GR 58, “L'ora di Guida,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, June 9, 1966; GR 59, “Reazione della D.C. ai lapiriani,” *La Nazione*, June 9, 1966; GR 60, “La rivolta dei lapiriani contro la DC a Firenze,” *Corriere della Sera*, June 10, 1966; GR 61, “La Pira non parla,” *La Nazione*, June 11, 1966; GR 62, “Stamani si vota,” *La Nazione*, June 12, 1966.

towards the world of the exploited and the poor.” As a result of these interjections by the group from Isolotto, the discussion grew intense. Ultimately, the laity from the community and Mazzi accused the others in attendance of accosting them with “offensive phrases.” The group was soon asked to leave the meeting.⁴⁹

As word of this heated exchange spread among Florentine Catholics, a group of laity from Isolotto and other parishes met in the community’s church to discuss the situation. At the end of this assembly, forty-two Catholics, representing “students, workers, and professionals from various regions of the city,” printed and distributed signed leaflets throughout Isolotto and other communities in Florence. Addressed to the “Catholic electorate of Florence,” the flyers defended the “autonomy of the laity in their political choices” that had been “affirmed by the Council.” They condemned the recent actions of the local faction of the Christian Democratic Party, whose decisions, they alleged, had prohibited certain individuals from running on the Florentine democratic list. The excluded candidates had always been respected by the Catholic electorate, had “always been inspired by Christian values” like those recently affirmed by the Council, and had never viewed “local administrative problems as separate from the fundamental ones of the workers and world peace.” To the authors of the leaflet, the decision of the local Christian Democrats to exclude these candidates “clearly demonstrated the desire to maintain in the world of workers divisions between Catholics and non-Catholics, already made obsolete by the teachings of Pope John.” Furthermore, these exclusions revealed the desire of some Christian Democrats to move the party towards a more conservative position “under the guise of good administration.” As a result of these recent actions, the authors of the leaflet declared they could not, as Catholics, vote for the candidates on the Christian Democratic list.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 34-35.

⁵⁰ EM Documenti 027, “Volantino elettorale ‘All’elektorato cattolico di Firenze’,” June 9, 1966.

Shortly after the dissemination of the leaflet, an article in *La Nazione* identified the masterminds behind the initiative as the clergy of two parishes, Isolotto and Nave di Rovezzano. The article went further, wondering what type of action would be taken by the Florentine Curia against these parishes and their priests, Enzo Mazzi and Luigi Rosadoni.⁵¹ Readers of *La Nazione* and other papers would not have to wait long for Cardinal Florit's response.

Early in the evening of June 11, Mazzi received word from a friend that he and Rosadoni would soon receive a "dictatorial and threatening letter" from the archbishop.⁵² In his letter dated that day, Florit noted that he had recently learned "through the press and in other ways" that Mazzi and other priests had played an "inspiring role" for those Catholics who had circulated leaflets expressing "an attitude contrary to that expressed in the notification of his auxiliary bishop." In order to "protect the honorability of the Florentine clergy and for the love of truth," Florit demanded that Mazzi immediately respond in writing and address two concerns: if and in what ways the "initiative had his collaboration and inspiration" and if Mazzi had, "in public or private," expressed an electoral position different than that indicated in the archdiocese's messages. Florit expected to receive Mazzi's reply later that evening. If he did not, he stated he would be forced to assume that Mazzi "shared responsibility for the initiative and therefore he would have publicly acted against a specific directive of your Bishop and of the Italian Episcopal Conference." If that were the case, Florit declared he would be forced to initiate disciplinary proceedings against Mazzi.⁵³

⁵¹ GR 59, "Reazione della D.C. ai lapiriani," *La Nazione*, June 9, 1966; GR 61, "La Pira non parla," *La Nazione*, June 11, 1966; and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 35. Don Luigi Rosadoni, who hailed from Siena and had been ordained in 1954, became the parish priest of Nave di Rovezzano in 1962. Like Enzo Mazzi, Rosadoni sought to serve the poorest of society and hoped to reform the Church's approach to the problems of the modern world. In 1968, Rosadoni resigned as parish priest in response to what he viewed as the ecclesiastical hierarchy's ongoing repression of efforts to revitalize parish life.

⁵² *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 36.

⁵³ EM Documenti 028, "Lettera del card. Ermenegildo Florit a don Mazzi in merito a un volantino diffuso," June 11, 1966.

The next morning, a statement from Florit appeared in several papers announcing that both priests had conceded their shared responsibility for the publishing of the pamphlet and that the Curia would be weighing appropriate measures.⁵⁴ At this point, however, Florit had only received a written response from Rosadoni. The previous evening, after learning of Florit's impending letter, Mazzi decided to wait to respond until after he had spent some time reflecting and talking with friends. After Florit's public statement, Mazzi felt even more pressure to craft a response that not only projected an appropriate level of respect for Florit and his views but also demonstrated support for the autonomy of the laity. In his brief letter to Florit, dated June 12, Mazzi apologized for not answering earlier, but noted he had only received the archbishop's note late the previous evening. Mazzi stressed that his parishioners who had signed the leaflet "had acted under their full and independent responsibility, in line with what they affirmed in the same document." Mazzi asked the archbishop to consider any "insinuation" that the priests of Isolotto participated in or supported the action "unjust and regrettable." That said, Mazzi endorsed the spirit of the document, arguing it "manifests our constant pursuit of respect towards all lay people" as outlined in the aims of the Second Vatican Council that sought "just freedom that belongs to all in the terrestrial city."⁵⁵

After these contentious exchanges surrounding the political events of the summer, Mazzi met with Cardinal Florit and the archdiocese's co-adjutor bishop on several occasions in the fall of 1966 to discuss the pastoral approach in Isolotto. At each meeting, Mazzi invited the archbishop to visit Isolotto and talk with the laity. According to media reports, Florit had visited nearly 500 parishes within the archdiocese at least once during the first three years of his

⁵⁴ GR 62, "I sacerdoti 'lapiriani' negano ogni solidarietà col manifesto pro La Pira," *La Nazione*, June 12, 1966.

⁵⁵ EM Documenti 029, "Risposta alla lettera di Florit su le elezioni amministrative," June 12, 1966.

tenure.⁵⁶ Yet the cardinal's last visit to Isolotto was in 1957 when he consecrated the parish's new church. After one of Mazzi's conversations, a group of approximately one hundred laity decided to request a meeting with Florit. The cardinal advised a representative of the group that his schedule was busy and if he was unavailable the faithful could meet with the coadjutor bishop. Later in the month, a group of five laity visited the archbishop's residence and were sent away without speaking to Florit. In response, they drafted a letter that over five hundred of the faithful in Isolotto ultimately signed. In the letter, the laity expressed concern that many Catholics viewed the Church as being indifferent to, and distant from, the pressing problems of everyday life. Summarizing the communal journey of the parish, the authors cited their experiences during the Council as a key stage in their maturation. They expressed their desire to talk with Florit about a Church that "welcomed the poor, the suffering, and the abandoned." Finally, the authors of the letter extended an invitation to Florit to visit Isolotto and talk with the faithful about their concerns and ambitions. According to the community, Cardinal Florit never responded to the letter.⁵⁷

Throughout the 1960s, the faithful of Isolotto not only spoke out about issues of local importance, they also participated in movements and actions focused on national and international concerns. Like many Catholics and other religious people around the world, the issues of peace, especially in Vietnam, and civil rights, occupied much of their attention. On multiple occasions, Isolotto's church hosted vigils for peace and assemblies of solidarity with oppressed people throughout the world. The faithful and the parish priests also sent letters to Cardinal Florit, other bishops, and even Pope Paul VI requesting that they, as representatives of the institutional Church, speak out against the killing and violence in Asia and the oppression of

⁵⁶ "Le figure dei nuovi porporati: Mons. Florit il pastore e lo studioso," *Il Giornale del Mattino*, January 26, 1965 and "L'omaggio della città all'Arcivescovo" *Il Giornale del Mattino*, January 27, 1965.

⁵⁷ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 29-33.

people's liberties, and stand up for the poor and disenfranchised. In many of these cases, the faithful in Isolotto situated their actions and calls for change within their experiences studying and applying the decrees and constitutions of the Second Vatican Council, as well as previous papal encyclicals, to their everyday realities.

The initial vigils for peace held within Isolotto's church occurred a few days before Christmas in both 1964 and 1965. Organized by a group of local youth affiliated with the Italian Catholic Scouting Association (*Associazione Scouts Cattolici Italiani*—ASCI), the program for the second vigil included the reading of selected texts by writers, poets, politicians, and popes. The readings were accompanied by the projection of images and the playing of classical music.⁵⁸ Less than a year later, in October 1966, a larger vigil for peace was held in the church. The twenty-four page program for the vigil included a timeline of violence in Vietnam and other countries around the world during the year, readings from the Bible, passages written by some of the faithful in Isolotto, selections from Thomas Moore and Peter Maurin of the Catholic Worker Movement, and excerpts from speeches and texts by John XXIII, Paul VI, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Secretary-General of the UN U Thant.⁵⁹ In 1967, as in years past, the faithful in Isolotto organized another vigil, this time a “vigil of penance” in the community church at midnight on Christmas morning. In addition to being focused on the violence being committed in Vietnam, the organizers of this vigil also included texts and discussions about social and economic problems plaguing people in numerous Latin American countries, the oppression of African independence movements, and the disenfranchisement of African

⁵⁸ GR 52, “Una veglia stasera alla Chiesa dell’Isolotto,” *Nazione Sera*, December 23, 1965; “Una veglia suggestiva nella Chiesa dell’Isolotto,” *La Nazione*, December 24, 1965; EMP 0646, “Testo della Veglia di Natale,” December 1964; EMP 0647, “Testo della Veglia sulla pace,” December 23, 1965; EMP 0648, “Testo della Veglia di Natale,” December 24, 1965. The vigil in 1965 sparked a similar event in early January 1966 in the parish church of Corea in Livorno (“La veglia per la pace nella Chiesa di Corea,” *Il Giornale del Mattino*, January 5, 1966 and “Una veglia cristiana,” *Il Telegrafo*, January 5, 1966.

⁵⁹ EMP 0650, “Veglia per la pace,” October 4, 1966.

Americans in the United States. Over two thousand people spent several hours in the church participating in the vigil before participating in the celebration of the Mass.⁶⁰

In addition to holding vigils within the parish church, the themes of peace and the war in Vietnam were frequently mentioned during religious services in Isolotto. During his homily on January 6, 1967, Mazzi declared that “war and violence are not absolutely necessary.” He also challenged a statement recently made by Cardinal Spellman, who had supposedly told American soldiers in Asia that they were fighting for God. Mazzi declared such a view to be “offensive to every Christian conscience.” Mazzi also reminded the faithful of how Florit, while not wanting to criticize his fellow cardinal, declared the words of Spellman contrary to “the Conciliar declarations and the constant appeal for peace by Paul VI.”⁶¹

A few months later, in comments made during Palm Sunday services, Mazzi asked the faithful gathered in Isolotto’s church to contemplate how the hundreds of thousands of deaths and the destruction of Vietnam’s landscape and civil society had been carried out, “for the most part, by Christians, including many Catholics.” Mazzi later read a letter addressed to Pope Paul VI. In the letter, some lay Catholics in the parish, who declared themselves to be “faithful to the teachings of the Council,” wanted to express their concern about “the suffering of the Vietnamese people.” Given the complicity of so many Catholics in the destruction of Vietnam, the signers of the letter argued they could “not avoid feeling that we are co-responsible for this genocide accomplished by the same Body we belong to,” the Body of Christ. The signees also quoted the condemnation of war contained in Conciliar documents as well as the speech Paul VI gave to the Council upon his return from visiting the UN in 1965. They thanked the pope for his

⁶⁰ EMP 0653, “Veglia di Natale,” December 25, 1967; “Veglia in chiesa per il Vietnam,” *La Nazione*, December 25, 1967; *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 135. For some selections of texts read during the vigil, see *Da Parma all’Isolotto*, 155-158.

⁶¹ EMP 0381, “Omelia dell’Epifania,” January 6, 1967.

efforts on behalf of peace so far, but requested that “his words could be further clarified” so that the faithful’s “participation in the sacred Easter Liturgy would become less insincere.” After reading the letter, Mazzi declared it to be “a cry of anguish, a type of prayer, a dialogue with our communal father, and thus with God.” The priest advised the faithful that if they wanted to add their name to the document, they could sign it after the celebration of the Mass.⁶²

When the parish priests from Isolotto, Casella, and San Luca a Vingone sent the signed letter to Paul VI, they also sent a copy to Cardinal Florit. They attached a note to their archbishop explaining the motivations behind the drafting of the letter. The priests argued the letter to the pope was a “sign of a proper act of sincerity and of opening towards our Pastors” and that they were “comforted in this belief” by the events and results of the Council.⁶³ Within a few days, several newspapers had reported on the letter sent by the three parishes.⁶⁴ In response, a group of Florentine laity sent a letter to Cardinal Florit. They defended the initial letter to the pope as part of an active effort to live the teachings of the Council and Gospel. Furthermore, they argued that criticisms of the initiative as too political “were not supported by a careful and detailed analysis.” They also included a copy of the letter to Paul VI, signed by 2500 people, and clips of relevant newspaper articles.⁶⁵

The community in Isolotto viewed their letter to Paul VI as an important step in their religious maturation, and their desire to act on behalf of peace continued to grow over time.⁶⁶ In advance of Easter Sunday, March 26, twelve Catholic groups, including some faithful in Isolotto,

⁶² EMP 0389, “Omelia per la Domenica delle palme,” March 19, 1967. The text of the letter to Paul VI is included in this document.

⁶³ EM Documenti 032, “Lettera di Fabio Masi, Enzo Mazzi, Paolo Caciolli, Sergio Gomiti a Ermenegildo Florit nella quale informano di una lettera indirizzata a Paolo VI sui bombardamenti in Vietnam,” March 19, 1967.

⁶⁴ GR 69, “Nel clima della Pasqua. Iniziativa per il Vietnam di tre parrocchie a Firenze,” *L’Avvenire d’Italia*, March 23, 1967.

⁶⁵ EM Documenti 033, “Gruppo di laici fiorentini. Lettera e documenti al Cardinale Florit perché intervenga su la Guerra in Vietnam,” March 23, 1967.

⁶⁶ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 134.

circulated a poster throughout the other parishes in Florence. The poster cited passages from the Bible, the Council's *Gaudium et Spes*, and the Easter Liturgy to argue that "celebrating Easter and destroying the Vietnamese population" is not "reconcilable." The poster reiterated the statement made in the earlier letter sent to Paul VI that fellow Catholics are responsible for the crimes against humanity being carried out in Vietnam.⁶⁷ Later that year, a group of faithful from Isolotto worked with other Catholic groups in Florence to organize a twenty-four hour vigil for peace in the piazza of the Uffizi Gallery in the historic center of the city.⁶⁸

In addition to actively participating in community, city, and national events for peace, the faithful of Isolotto waged campaigns against racism and colonialism. For the Catholics in the community, ending racial discrimination was a necessary step in both their quest for global peace and a realization of a Church of the Poor. They also saw this as a necessary component of their membership in the People of God. Their efforts dated back to the pre-Conciliar years, when in 1959 the community held an assembly of solidarity with African Americans in Isolotto's church. During that gathering, those in the church read and discussed texts by Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights activists and sang spirituals. Enzo Mazzi introduced several speakers, including a novelist and singer who also happened to be a member of the Italian Communist Party.⁶⁹ Throughout the early 1960s, the topics of racism and civil rights were frequently discussed during Mazzi's homilies, especially in light of the experiences of, and the documents originating from, the Council.

In the late 1960s, the faithful organized numerous vigils and assemblies in support of those people facing racial discrimination around the world, especially in the United States, South Africa, India, and the Middle East. In May 1967, a group of young Catholics in Isolotto

⁶⁷ EM Documenti 036, "Volantino per la Paqua del 1967 contro la guerra in Vietnam," March 26, 1967.

⁶⁸ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 135.

⁶⁹ EM Documenti 015, "Biglietto a stampa per un'assemblea di solidarietà con i negri d'America," 1959.

presented a vigil that was meant to build on the efforts of the Christmas vigil two years earlier. The youth argued racial discrimination constituted a “war” and they hoped to create an experience that would allow their fellow Catholics to “feel the drama of the problem” and raise awareness. The reading of selections from the Bible, speeches by John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” and other texts were accompanied by lighting, music, and sound effects.⁷⁰ Later that year, during the community’s annual Christmas vigil, the faithful focused on the intersections of racial oppression and international peace.⁷¹

While the residents of Isolotto challenged their fellow Catholics to consider their own complicity in the horrors of the war in Vietnam during Easter 1967, they similarly organized events and actions speaking out against racial discrimination during Easter 1968. In a homily during Lent, Mazzi devoted his comments to speaking out against the apartheid and injustices occurring in Rhodesia and South Africa.⁷² On Palm Sunday, April 7, three days after Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination, Mazzi discussed key moments in the life of the slain civil rights leader and read selections from some of his writings. The Catholic priest from the small Italian community on the outskirts of Florence argued that the “life and message” of the Baptist minister from the southern United States should guide the faithful of Isolotto and all Christians everywhere in their future actions.⁷³ Less than a week later, on Holy Thursday, the community hosted an assembly of solidarity with African Americans in the United States. Thousands attended the vigil in Isolotto’s church. After detailing the lengthy history of racial struggle in the United States, some of the organizers read passages regarding revolution from civil rights leaders

⁷⁰ EMP 0651, “Le discriminazioni razziali. Veglia presentata dal Gruppo giovanile,” May 6, 1967.

⁷¹ EMP 0653, “Veglia di Natale,” December 25, 1967; “Veglia in chiesa per il Vietnam,” *La Nazione*, December 25, 1967; *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 135. For some selections of texts read during the vigil, see *Da Parma all’Isolotto*, 155-158.

⁷² EMP 0421, “Omelia per la Ila domenica di Quaresima,” March 1968.

⁷³ EMP 0424, “Omelia e letture per la Domenica delle palme,” April 7, 1968.

and intellectuals such as Martin Luther King Jr., Malcom X, and Stokely Carmichael. Those in attendance decried King's recent assassination and attributed it to "a profoundly violent society, a society in which every one of us bears partial responsibility." Finally, one of the organizers declared that if society "continues to crush the poor with violence, then the anger of the poor will explode and it's possible the earth will move further towards its destruction."⁷⁴

The tension and mistrust between the faithful in Isolotto and Florentine religious officials continued to intensify between January and August of 1968. At the beginning of the year, the Florentine archdiocese held a second conference for priests regarding theology and tradition. As he did during the previous meeting of this kind in November 1967, Enzo Mazzi addressed his fellow priests and ecclesiastical officials.⁷⁵ In his comments, Mazzi questioned the practical effects of religious tradition and "the ideological, moral, and social impositions" of the Church on the Christian people. Referencing the clash the community of Isolotto had experienced with Florit during the 1966 political election, Mazzi suggested that the imposition of "temporal choices" leads to "an emptying of the genuine concept of tradition."⁷⁶ A few days after his comments, Mazzi received a letter from Monsignor Bruno Panerai, who at the time served as a parish priest in the archdiocese and would later play a role in the tense conflict between the community of Isolotto and the Florentine Curia. In his lengthy comments, which included references to the Council's positions on the Church hierarchy, Panerai saluted Mazzi's intelligence and energy, but cautioned him in regards to his approach towards Cardinal Florit.

⁷⁴ EMP 0654, "Venerdì Santo 1968. Assemblea di solidarietà con i negri d'America," April 12, 1968. See also *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 140-142 and *Da Parma all'Isolotto*, 159-162.

⁷⁵ EM Documenti 046, "Interventi e risposte, relative al tema delle implicazioni pastorali, che non hanno trovato posto nelle dispense della prima giornata del corso di aggiornamento biblico-teologico per il clero," November 1967.

⁷⁶ EM Documenti 047, "Scaletta dell'intervento di Enzo Mazzi alla II giornata di aggiornamento per il clero," January 8, 1968. During the conference, Sergio Gomiti, then the parish priest of Casella, spoke on the relationship between personal liberty and faith (EM Documenti 049, "Intervento di Sergio Gomiti alla II giornata di aggiornamento del clero dopo la relazione di p. Alfaro," January 1968).

Panerai also suggested that Mazzi avoid the appearance of public confrontations with Church officials.⁷⁷

It appears Mazzi chose to ignore this brotherly advice from Panerai as he, along with three other priests, sent a letter to Florit and the priests of the archdiocese later in the month. In their letter, the four priests took issue with some of the comments made and positions taken on the last day of the conference. Over the next few weeks, five priests sent individual responses to Mazzi and his co-authors. In their correspondence, the priests criticized both the tone and content of the letter, as well as earlier interventions made by Mazzi and the others.⁷⁸ In their later histories of the community, many in Isolotto identified this series of public exchanges as a key factor in Cardinal Florit's decision later in the year to remove Mazzi from the parish.

In late January, Mazzi and Cacioli sent a letter to the community informing parishioners that Confirmation would be delayed until later in the year due to Florit's unavailability. Thus, the priests would be temporarily suspending preparations for children until further notice. Many in Isolotto found it easy to believe that Florit was punishing the community's children in response to Mazzi's statements at the first conference for clergy in November 1967 and the second conference earlier that month.⁷⁹ Mazzi himself accused Florit of such behavior in a June letter. After summarizing the recent history between the parish and the Florentine Curia regarding

⁷⁷ EM Documenti 048, "Mons. Panerai Vicario Urbano di Porta Romana a Enzo Mazzi: non condivide l'intervento alla II giornata di aggiornamento del clero irrispettosa del superior," January 10, 1968.

⁷⁸ EM Documenti 050, "Lettera di Mazzi, Borghi, Masi, Rosadoni ai sacerdoti fiorentini. Allegate le risposte," January 18, 1968. Mazzi and his fellow priests also received a letter from a group of theology professors (EM Documenti 051, "D. Valerio Mannucci direttore Centro Biblico Diocesano. Lettera ai sacerdoti fiorentini in risposta alla lettera di Mazzi, Borghi, Masi, Rosadoni," January 26, 1968).

⁷⁹ EMP 0636/1, "Preparazione alla cresima, lettera di 'Enzo Mazzi e Paolo Cacioli' a 'Cari genitori'," January 23, 1968. In early June, Mazzi, Cacioli, and Gomiti notified parishioners in Isolotto and Casella that preparation for Confirmation would begin soon as Florit had agreed to visit Isolotto for the ceremony (EMP 0639/1, "Preparazione alla cresima, lettera di 'Enzo Mazzi-Sergio Gomiti-Paolo Cacioli', 'Ai ragazzi e ragazze che devono ricevere la Cresima e ai loro genitori,'" June 4, 1968). Later in the summer, Isolotto's priests provided children participating in Confirmation with a document that included a discussion of the pastoral experience in the community. This text would be revised and published later in 1968 as *Incontro a Gesu* (EMP 0641, "Indicazioni sul percorso catechistico," June 1968).

Confirmation, Mazzi declared that if the archbishop wanted to “strike [the priest’s] pastoral activity and person,” it would be best if he “avoided making the people in his ministry pay.”⁸⁰

In March 1968, the three priests of Isolotto and Casella sent a lengthy letter to the families of both parishes. They described the letter as an “instrument of reflection” and a chance to talk. In the letter, the priests outlined their pastoral objectives in light of the experiences and results of the Council. The priests contended the faithful had to fight against some who sought to have “a monopoly of truth,” who would prevent others from having “freedom of conscience,” and who would shut down “opposing structures and groups.” This opposition, which might even come from their fellow lay Catholics, originated in a desire to return to a pre-Vatican II Church. Finally, the priests invited all the faithful to attend a meeting in the parish to discuss the themes covered in the letter.⁸¹

For months, some in Isolotto had worried about being targeted by the Florentine Curia due to their actions, assemblies, and statements over the past few years. In June of 1968, the priests and a group of lay Catholics circulated a letter to the other priests and laity throughout the archdiocese. In their letter, they advocated for a continuation of the discussion from January regarding the relevance of theology for the modern day. They asked their fellow Catholics to read an article by Spanish theologian J.M. Gonzàlez-Ruiz and consider the possible intersections between the Gospel and socialist revolution.⁸² In the weeks following the distribution of the letter, the faithful in Isolotto received word that the themes of discussion during Mazzi’s recent

⁸⁰ EM Documenti 053, “Lettera di Enzo Mazzi a ‘Eminenza’ con la quale chiede di non far pagare alle persone legate al suo ministero le distanze che si erano create tra loro,” June 3, 1968. Mazzi received a response from Monsignor Panerai within two days explaining Florit’s inability to meet with a group of physically-challenged individuals in Isolotto (EM Documenti 055, “Lettera di risposta di Bruno Panerai a Enzo,” June 5, 1968).

⁸¹ EMP 0093/1, “Enzo Mazzi, Paolo Caciolli, Sergio Gomiti ‘A tutte le famiglie dell’Isolotto’,” March 17, 1968.

⁸² EM Documenti 057, “Lettera dei sacerdoti e laici della parrocchia dell’Isolotto ai sacerdoti e laici della diocesi di Firenze,” June 13, 1968.

homilies had been reported to the Curia.⁸³ For many in Isolotto, this news not only fueled their distrust of the motives of Church officials, it threatened to fracture the unity that had marked the community's pastoral action since its founding in 1954.

4. Conclusion

Since Cardinal Elia Dalla Costa's death in December 1961, the lay Catholics and priests in the community of Isolotto increasingly found themselves to be without influence in the Florentine Church. The support they had received from ecclesiastical officials had also disappeared. While Archbishop Florit and his subordinates repeatedly notified Enzo Mazzi of their disagreement with the tenor and tactics of the community's approach to religious practice and social and political reform, Church officials nonetheless exercised restraint in how they handled the situation. This would change in the autumn of 1968.

On July 29, 1968, the Vatican issued Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae vitae* ("Of Human Life").⁸⁴ In the works of many scholars, the publication of this encyclical and the fierce response it generated by Catholics around the world marked the beginning of a new and heated chapter in the history of the Catholic Church.⁸⁵ Yet the event that threatened the unity of the Florentine Church happened in mid-September in Parma, Italy, when a small group of young Catholics occupied the city's historic cathedral for a few hours. A week later, Catholics in Isolotto would publicly distribute a letter supporting the actions of those in Parma and criticizing the hierarchical structure of the Church.

⁸³ EM Documenti 058, "Omelia della III Domenica dopo Pentecoste," June 23, 1968 and EM Documenti 059, "Omelia per la IV Domenica dopo Pentecoste," June 30, 1968.

⁸⁴ *Humanae Vitae*, July 29, 1968, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html.

⁸⁵ For more on the story behind the drafting of this encyclical, see: Robert McClory, *Turning Point: The Inside Story of the Papal Birth Control Commission, and how Humanae Vitae Changed the Life of Patty Crowley and the Future of the Church* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1995). For information about the reception of *Humanae Vitae*, see: Joseph A. Komonchak, "Humanae Vitae and Its Reception," *Theological Studies*, Vol. 39, 2 (1978), 221-257 and Richard A McCormick, "Humanae Vitae 25 Years Later," *America Magazine*, July 17, 1993.

Tensions between the faithful in Isolotto and the Florentine Curia intensified as Catholics in the community repeatedly challenged the sacramental authority of Florit as archbishop. Ultimately, this struggle would lead to the removal of Isolotto's priests and the closure of the parish church for nearly eight months in 1969. Throughout this period of conflict, the faithful in Isolotto repeatedly grounded their declarations and actions within their understanding and experiences of the Second Vatican Council. For the Catholics in Isolotto, the events of the late 1960s were nothing more than a continuation of their communal journey of maturation and enlightenment that began in the 1950s and intensified during the years of the Council.

Chapter IV Occupation, Protest, and Dialogue

1. Introduction

Twenty-three Catholics entered Parma's cathedral at half past four in the afternoon on September 14, 1968 to discuss what they deemed to be significant problems plaguing the local and global Catholic Church. Once inside, the Catholics sat in a circle in the middle of the cathedral's center nave and began to read aloud and discuss three texts they had composed in advance.¹ At five o'clock, a few members of the group exited the cathedral to hang a banner, which read "*Cattedrale occupata*," between the roman columns on either side of the closed central doors. They also posted signs announcing their assembly and distributed leaflets to individuals in the piazza and Catholics entering the cathedral for evening Mass. Inside the cathedral, some lay Catholics momentarily joined the small group, intrigued by both the oddity of the event and the extraordinariness of the topics being discussed. Others, once they learned of the gathering's focus, sought to interrupt and stop it. Most of the faithful, however, simply stared at the Catholics as if they were "a new masterpiece among those of the cathedral or a dangerous crack in the floor."² Shortly before the celebration of the Mass began at half past six, members of various "spontaneous groups" (*gruppi spontanei*) from Milan (including students from

¹ The titles of these texts are "Documento preliminare," "Documento d'occupazione N.1," and "Documento d'occupazione N.2." Local newspapers published selections from the texts as part of their coverage of the occupation. The texts are reproduced in *Cattedrale Occupata*, a history of the occupation and compilation of relevant documents composed and published in 1969 by several members of *I Protagonisti*, whose members formed the core of the Catholics who occupied the cathedral. The documents can also be found in Marco Boato, ed. *Contro la chiesa di classe: documenti della contestazione ecclesiale in Italia*, (Padova: Marsilio Editori, 1969), 209-216. Group members used chairs that were stored in stacks at the back of the cathedral's central nave.

² Gruppo 'i protagonisti', *Cattedrale Occupata* (Florence: Cultura Editrice, 1969), 13.

Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore), Verona, and Bolzano joined the assembly.³ In order to participate in the celebration of the Mass in the cathedral's crypt, the Catholics temporarily halted their assembly. A few individuals from the group asked the officiant, Monsignor Rossolini, if he would deliver the homily as a dialogue so all those present could contribute, but he rejected their request. Rossolini also refused the group members' invitation to discuss the Gospel reading with all interested Catholics after the Mass.⁴

At the conclusion of the Mass, the Catholics reconvened their discussion in the cathedral's central nave. Monsignor Triani, the rector of the Major Seminary, soon approached the gathering and announced the building would be closing at half past seven that evening. In response, some of the Catholics claimed that as part of the people of God, they had a right to remain and pray in the cathedral. Triani was soon joined by Monsignor Marastoni, who represented the diocese's apostolic administrator, as well as Parma's deputy police chief and plainclothes and uniformed police agents. Within a few minutes, discussion among the various parties grew heated and a brief physical altercation occurred. In an attempt to end the confrontation and encourage the Catholics to leave the cathedral, police officers removed the chairs that had been used throughout the event. The Catholics, however, refused to leave and sat on the floor. In response, police agents handcuffed and dragged the Catholics down the central nave of the cathedral and out into the piazza. After their expulsion from the cathedral, the Catholics involved in the gathering continued their discussion with several hundred additional

³ Gruppo 'i protagonisti', *Cattedrale Occupata*, 13. These "spontaneous groups" included the Fratelli Brüder Society in Bolzano, the Bernanos Society in Milan, and the Mounier Society in Verona. For more on the origins and characteristics of *gruppi spontanei* in Italy, see: Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of Vatican II: Western European Progressive Catholicism in the Long Sixties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 139-146 and Ettore Rotelli, "I gruppi spontanei del '68," in Lorenzo Bedeschi et al., *I cristiani nella sinistra. Dalla Resistenza a oggi* (Rome: Coines, 1976), 186.

⁴ Gruppo 'i protagonisti', *Cattedrale Occupata*, 14.

people who had responded to the group's earlier call for a public assembly at nine o'clock that evening in the piazza.⁵

Catholics and non-Catholics in Italy and other countries had occupied, and held protests within and outside, churches and other religious buildings in the months preceding the occupation of the Parma cathedral in September 1968. In March of that year, Paolo Sorbi, a Catholic and university student, disrupted the Lenten sermon in the packed cathedral of Trent when he voiced his displeasure with what he perceived to be the message's inauthenticity.⁶ In April, Fabrizio Fabbrini similarly contested a sermon during a Mass in Rome.⁷ In May, university students in Paris temporarily occupied the churches of Saint-Sev rin and Saint-Honor -d'Elyau during the period of unrest that swept the French capital.⁸ In June, approximately fifty Franciscans from Veneto and Lombardy gathered in their order's headquarters in Rome to protest prohibitions against changes enacted to the living conditions within their religious community.⁹ And in August 1968, one month before the occupation of the Parma cathedral, over two-hundred Catholics, including university students, young priests, and a few nuns, occupied the cathedral of Santiago, Chile to protest against the policies of the Catholic Church in Latin America and the imminent visit of Pope Paul VI to Bogota, Columbia.¹⁰

Despite the frequency of these incidents throughout the Catholic world, and the ample coverage devoted to them in Italian newspapers, the occupation of the Parma cathedral

⁵ "Un gesto senza precedenti nella storia della nostra citt ," *Gazzetta di Parma*, September 15, 1968, 5; Gruppo 'i protagonisti', *Cattedrale Occupata*, 14-15.

⁶ Boato, ed., *Contro la chiesa di classe*, 30-31.

⁷ Giuseppe Gozzini, *Esercizi di memoria il '68 visto dal basso: Sussidio didattico per chi non c'era, Cronologie 1967-1975* (Trieste: Asterios Editore, 2008), 227.

⁸ Carlo Falconi, *La contestazione nella Chiesa* (Milano: Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore, 1969), 298.

⁹ Gozzini, *Esercizi di memoria*, 227.

¹⁰ For examples of Italian press coverage of the Santiago occupation, see: "Occupano per 'protesta' la cattedrale di Santiago," *La Nazione*, August 13, 1968; "Lasciata dagli occupant la cattedrale di Santiago," *La Nazione*, August 13, 1968; "Non sono pentiti i preti che occuparono la chiesa," *La Nazione*, August 17, 1968. For more background on, and context of, the Santiago occupation, see Roberto Magni and Livio Zanotti, eds. *America Latina: La chiesa si contesta* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1969).

nonetheless shocked Italian society. The images of young Catholics being forcibly restrained and removed from the cathedral spurred Catholics and non-Catholics to voice their support for either the protesting Catholics or the ecclesiastical hierarchy in Parma. In the months that followed the Parma incident, Catholics continued to occupy and protest within churches to challenge what they deemed to be autocratic cultures entrenched in the institutional Church as well as the Italian workplace, government, and educational system. During these occupations and protests, the Catholics involved frequently faced verbal, and occasionally physical, resistance from other lay Catholics, Church officials, and agents of the Italian state. Afterwards, critics of these actions launched fierce public condemnations of the methodology and underlying motivations of Catholic protestors and advocated for the strict and quick enforcement of legal and ecclesiastical punishments.

In this chapter, I focus on the protests within, and occupations of, several churches and cathedrals in Italy during 1968 and 1969. Through an examination of the occupation of the Parma cathedral in the chapter's first section, I argue that Catholics' occupation of churches throughout the Catholic world during the late 1960s was not merely an act of protest limited to issues of secular practice. Rather, Catholics protested within churches to discuss an intertwined set of political, cultural, social, and religious issues, such as the Vietnam War, civil rights in the United States, economic inequality, and the absence of participatory cultures in the workplace, government, educational systems, and religious institutions. In so doing, they both used and refashioned the symbolic sacred character of churches. These Catholics' multifaceted agendas were not, as some historians have argued, a sign of diminished influence of religion and the increasing secularization of society.¹¹ Instead, as I suggest, the goals of Catholics who occupied

¹¹ Robert Lumley, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (New York: Verso, 1989), 10. See also Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) and Hugh

churches symbolized both the pervasive resonance of religion and the braided nature of the local and global during the tumultuous years of the late 1960s.¹²

In the second section of this chapter, I explore the intersections of Catholic and student protests in the late 1960s and the ways in which societal perceptions of the student movement influenced the reception of the ideas put forth by Catholics who occupied churches, as well as the events themselves. I contend that Italians involved in the occupations of universities and churches shared a similar perspective towards the symbolic importance of space. However, student and Catholic protestors often approached and behaved within occupied spaces in diverse ways. Unlike students, who frequently barricaded themselves within university buildings, Catholics did not generally attempt to physically control the space of occupied churches. Nonetheless, lay Catholics realized that the sacred character of churches and cathedrals lent their actions enhanced symbolic importance. By choosing these places, Catholics challenged powerful and long-practiced customs that dictated who should speak in churches and the topics that should be discussed. In this sense, I argue that Catholics' occupations of churches should be interpreted, in part, as an attempt at dialogue with other Catholics, both Church officials and lay Catholics.

2. Cattedrale Occupata

Debates over the Parma cathedral occupation and other protests vividly demonstrate the clashing of diverse visions of sacred space among Catholics. Many, particularly members of the Church hierarchy, regarded these incidents as profane defilements of the sacred character of churches.

These Catholics believed that if such acts continued they would lead to the erasure of what Louis

McLeod and Werner Ustorf, eds., *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹² John Foot, "Looking back on Italy's 'Long '68': Public, Private and Divided Memories," in Ingo Cornils and Sarah Waters, eds., *Memories of 1968: International Perspectives* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 106. Foot contends that the "national history of 68 is a misnomer" (emphasis not mine).

P. Nelson has argued is the “boundary that defines and contains” sacred space and chaos.¹³ In their denunciation of protests, critics’ perception of sacred space influenced how they viewed the Catholics who occupied churches. They attempted to brand their fellow Catholics as either misguided and naïve youth or outsiders driven by ideological fervor and hatred towards the Church. Catholics who occupied churches, however, did not view their actions to be a misinformed or intentional effort to disrupt or foul the sacred character of churches. Rather, they considered their transgressions, albeit dramatic, to be a reaffirmation of the sacredness and importance of churches in a rapidly changing society.¹⁴ Catholics who occupied or spoke out in churches believed their actions most closely adhered to the true spirit of the Church represented by the lived experience of the Second Vatican Council. In the debates that followed these incidents, Catholic protestors claimed the location of their protests enhanced the authenticity of their arguments. Ultimately, the inability of these Catholics and their critics to reconcile their differing conceptions of how churches and other sacred spaces should be used, by whom, and for what purposes, hindered efforts to engage in dialogue and create unity in the Church during one of the most tumultuous periods in its recent history. This failure to capitalize upon opportunities for discussion and understanding also influenced how the events of the 1960s would be interpreted by discordant factions within the Church for decades.¹⁵

¹³ Louis P. Nelson, “Introduction,” in *American Sanctuary: Understanding Sacred Spaces*, ed. Louis P. Nelson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 7.

¹⁴ My use of the concept of transgression has been influenced by the works of Georges Bataille (particularly *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (New York City: City Light Books, 1986)) and Michel Foucault (“A Preface to Transgression,” in Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. and trans. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977)).

¹⁵ For example, see: Massimo Faggioli, *A Council for the Global Church: Receiving Vatican II in History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015); Lieven Boeve, Mathijs Lamberigts, and Terrence Merrigan, eds., *The Contested Legacy of Vatican II: Lessons and Prospects* (Leuven: Peeters, 2015); Shaji George Kochuthara, CMI, ed., *Revisiting Vatican II: 50 Years of Renewal*, vol. 1 (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2014); Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (New York: Paulist Press, 2012); John W. O’Malley S.J., “‘The Hermeneutic of Reform’: A Historical Analysis,” *Theological Studies* 73, no. 3 (2012): 517-546; John W. O’Malley, et al., *Vatican II: Did Anything Happen*, ed. David G. Schultenover (New York: Continuum, 2007); Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004); Giuseppe Alberigo, Jean-

Members of the Catholic group *I Protagonisti* constituted the nucleus of those who occupied the Parma cathedral on September 14, 1968. The group had formed a few years earlier as a branch of *Gioventù Studentesca* (an organization that gained notoriety for its role in the occupation of *Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore* (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart) in Milan) in the parish of Santa Maria alla Pace, located on the outskirts of Parma in the working-class neighborhood of Prati Bocchi.¹⁶ Shortly thereafter, the group gained a young and energetic leader when the religious hierarchy appointed Don Pino Setti as parish priest. During the next few years, Setti promoted the Beat Mass (*Messa beat*), a musical style inspired by the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council that paired Christian texts with rock, pop, and jazz music. Setti and some of his parishioners studied texts written by intellectuals, writers, and political activists such as Pier Paolo Pasolini, Ignazio Silone, and Malcolm X. They also expressed their solidarity with the student movement in Italy and forged connections with Catholic “spontaneous groups” in other Italian cities. In November 1967, Setti, against the orders of Church officials, and some of the faithful from the parish participated in a peace march against the war in Vietnam inspired by the pacifist, writer, and anti-Mafia activist Danilo Dolci and supported by the Italian Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiano*). Frustrated and embarrassed ecclesiastical officials in Parma launched an investigation into Setti’s practices. A few weeks before the occupation of the cathedral, the hierarchy transferred Setti to the tiny mountain parish of Vestana

Pierre Jossua, and Joseph A. Komonchak, eds., *The Reception of Vatican II* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987). Some leading examples of a more traditionalist and critical approach to the Council’s legacy include: Roberto de Mattei, *Il Concilio Vaticano II: Una storia mai scritta* (Turin: Lindau, 2011); Bruno Gherardini, *The Ecumenical Vatican Council II: A Much Needed Discussion* (Frigento: Casa Mariana Editrice, 2009); Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering, eds., *Vatican II: Renewal Within Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Agostino Marchetto, *Il Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II: Contrappunto per la sua storia* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005). For a more detailed discussion of the broader historiography of the Second Vatican Council, see the introduction to this dissertation.

¹⁶ Not all members of *I Protagonisti* took part in the occupation of the Parma cathedral. Those who did were joined by members of the group “Mattei,” which was based in the town of Langhirano (twelve miles south of Parma), as well as a few Catholics unaffiliated with a particular group.

di Corniglio forty kilometers southwest of the city.¹⁷ Setti's departure, and the arrival of Francesco Schianchi, a Catholic student activist who had participated in the occupation of Cattolica, spurred members of *I Protagonisti* to "make a symbolic gesture of rupture to introduce [them]selves" and their issues to a wider community, which they hoped to engage in conversation and shock into action.¹⁸

In the days leading up to the occupation of the cathedral, group members prepared by constructing signs, printing pamphlets, and drafting texts to be discussed during the event. Although Setti was no longer the parish priest in Prati Bocchi, he remained in regular communication with the group and contributed to the writing of various documents.¹⁹ During this dynamic moment in the brief history of *I Protagonisti*, most members did not care if their preparations remained secret. As the group later declared in a document drafted and released after the occupation, "the only impatience was to shout to others: we walk together, towards Christ alongside the poor!"²⁰ The group further demonstrated its desire to publically act by notifying the police, media, and ecclesiastical officials of their plan to occupy the cathedral.

A swift and severe reaction immediately followed the occupation. Conservative and centrist press organizations condemned the act as a thoughtless and violent desecration of the cathedral's sacred character. The following day, *Gazzetta di Parma*, a daily paper owned by

¹⁷ Roberto Beretta, *Il lungo autunno* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1998), 149-150 and Horn, *The Spirit of Vatican II*, 205-208. For more on *I Protagonisti*, see: "'Cattedrale occupata': 40 anni fa l'episodio piu clamoroso del Sessantotto parmigiano," *Gazzetta di Parma*, September 15, 2008; "Un gesto senza precedenti nella storia della nostra città," *Gazzetta di Parma*, September 15, 1968; Brunella Manotti, "'La mia religione era un profumo': Parma e il dissenso cattolico. Il caso de I Protagonisti," in Margherita Becchetti et al., *Parma dentro la rivolta. Tradizione e radicalità nelle lotte sociali e politiche di una città dell'Emilia rossa 1968-1969* (Milan: Punto Rosso, 2000, 33-84. Setti believed that his participation in the peace march was a significant factor in the decision to transfer him to another parish (Beretta, *Il lungo autunno*, 150).

¹⁸ Francesco Schianchi, as quoted in Beretta, *Il lungo autunno*, 147-148.

¹⁹ Beretta, *Il lungo autunno*, 150. A few days after the occupation, Setti released a statement distancing himself from *I Protagonisti* and clarifying why he was transferred a few weeks earlier. Years later, Setti explained that he felt pressured to make sure members of the Church hierarchy knew he was not present at the occupation and that he was not challenging the authority of the bishop.

²⁰ Gruppo 'i protagonisti', *Cattedrale Occupate*, 12.

Parma's Employers' Association (*Unione Parmense degli Industriali*), devoted an entire page to the occupation, which it deemed to be "a gesture without precedent in the history of [the] city." The paper expressed disgust, on the behalf of most Catholics, at the "unfortunate and confusing protest" that was "in violation of the sacred atmosphere of the church."²¹ A few days later, the national Catholic magazine *L'Avvenire D'Italia* published an open letter penned by a group of "noted professionals and political personalities." According to the magazine, these individuals were upset at being "spectators...of the unworthy racket staged within our cathedral" and it declared that "the house of God should be and remain a 'house of prayer' and not a gym of irreverent and irresponsible exhibitions." In their letter to the magazine, the professors, doctors, and lawyers expressed support for religious officials in Parma and stated their desire for a "restorative function for the serious offence committed against the house of God."²² Not to be outdone, *La Domenica del Corriere*, a popular national weekly based in Milan, found a creative method to disparage the "unprecedented action" by noting that the Catholics "had occupied the Cathedral wanted nine centuries ago by the anti-pope Cadalo."²³

²¹ "Un gesto senza precedenti nella storia della nostra città," *Gazzetta di Parma*, September 15, 1968.

²² The full text of the *L'Avvenire* article was published by *il Resto Del Carlino*, a conservative daily based in Bologna, on September 16, 1968, and can be found in *Cattedrale Occupata* (63). By the end of 1968, *L'Avvenire D'Italia* merged with another Catholic journal, *L'Italia* of Milan, to form *Avvenire*, which has maintained close ties to the Church hierarchy since the days of Pope Paul VI. See also "Severe condanne per l'occupazione della cattedrale," *L'Avvenire D'Italia*, September 17, 1968, 6. Calls to re-sanctify churches after protests and occupations were a common occurrence during the late 1960s. In Santiago, Chile, Cardinal Raul Silva condemned the occupation of that city's cathedral in August 1968, stating that "our cathedral has been profaned." Before the cathedral was reopened, the archdiocese held a Eucharist celebration to repair and reconsecrate the building ("L'occupazione della cattedrale di Santiago," in *American latina: la Chiesa si contesta*, 222). In Mexico City, after students and other activists had packed the main square, the *Zócalo*, and rung the bells of the adjacent Metropolitan Cathedral of the Assumption on August 27, 1968, counter-demonstrators and the government bemoaned the supposed defiling of the church (Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices*, 100-104).

²³ Gruppo 'i protagonisti', *Cattedrale occupata*, 46. In 1059, Pietro Cadalo, then a bishop, was the driving force behind the beginning of the cathedral's construction. It was consecrated in 1106. After the papal election of Alexander II in 1061, Cadalo was elected Honorius II by disenchanted nobles and bishops. After several conflicts that saw Honorius seize St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, flee to Parma, return to Rome and capture Castel Sant'Angelo, and finally return again to Parma, the antipope was excommunicated in 1063 and anathemized the following year.

Those who claimed the occupation violated the sacredness of the cathedral often depicted the behavior of Catholic demonstrators as rebellious, disrespectful, and militaristic. *Gazzetta di Parma's* coverage portrayed them as a “swarm of young people [who] refused from the very beginning to come to more reasonable conclusions” and rejected overtures to meet with ecclesiastical officials. According to the paper, the actions and attitudes of those involved in the occupation became “open and arrogant defiance” after Monsignor Rossolini concluded the celebration of the Mass. This attitude supposedly did not end with the clearing of the cathedral by police, since “scenes of protest and mockery continued” in the piazza until a crowd of two hundred people finally dispersed around midnight.²⁴ In an editorial published in *L'Avvenire D'Italia* a few days after the occupation, the paper advised those who shared the views of the participants to “not confuse the ‘real Church’ with the ‘temple church of God;’ do not confuse the ‘people of God’ with a ‘pusillus grex [little flock] of the angry; do not confuse, finally, the ‘assembly of the children of God’ with a circle around the campfire.”²⁵ Underlying these criticisms was a fear that a lenient response to the occupation might further encourage other Catholics to act, which would not only threaten the sacred nature of individual churches throughout Italy and elsewhere, but also potentially lead to more instability within the Church, which was facing challenges on a variety of theological and social fronts.

Members of *I Protagonisti* publicly responded to the many charges leveled against them in the days and weeks following the occupation. In particular, they addressed the criticism that they had desecrated the cathedral's sacred character. In a document released a few days after the occupation, the group asserted that such a claim relied on a faulty understanding of their methods and goals:

²⁴ “Un gesto senza precedenti nella storia della nostra città,” *Gazzetta di Parma*, September 15, 1968.

²⁵ “Teologia in piazza,” *L'Avvenire D'Italia*, September 17, 1968, 6.

We have maintained that the real presence of Christ is among those people who gather in his name as the guarantee to open this ‘participatory research’ of Truth in the house of the Lord where the people of God find nourishment (*la linfa*) to spread to all the Word and the Life. It was certainly a new “prayer,” aimed at a new presence and therefore an assumption of responsibility sanctioned precisely by the particularity of the place.²⁶

The Catholics of *I Protagonisti* did not consider their occupation to be a violation of the sacred nature of the cathedral. They did not view the cathedral as a profane or “indifferent space” and did not consider their issues to be of a non-religious character.²⁷ Rather, the members of *I Protagonisti* chose the cathedral as the site of their protest because of what James Fernandez has described as the building’s architectonic, or the “feelings and meanings the space evoked.”²⁸ As one member of the group later declared, the “student movement occupied the university; we are Catholics so we occupied our home. For us the church was our home; we did not regard it as the home of priests only.”²⁹ In addition to feeling like their home, the Parma cathedral held significance for group members because it was the most sacred, communal, and central place within the diocese and the city.³⁰ By holding their discussion in the cathedral, the young Catholics attempted to legitimize their claims by situating themselves within the city’s religious, social, and political history.³¹ Members of *I Protagonisti* and other lay Catholics considered the cathedral to be the most appropriate place to discuss their concerns regarding the management of the diocese and the institutional Church. They also believed the sacredness of the cathedral

²⁶ “Documento d’ occupazione N. 3,” *Cattedrale occupata*, 32 and Boato, *Contro la chiesa di classe*, 219.

²⁷ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston, Beacon Press, 1969), xxxii). Bachelard posits that “space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space.”

²⁸ James W. Fernandez, *Bwiti: An Ethnography of the Religious Imagination in Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 411-412.

²⁹ Manotti, “La mia religione era un profumo”, in Becchetti et al., *Parma dentro la rivolta*, 55.

³⁰ For a study of the urban space of Parma in the thirteenth century and the political, social, cultural, and religious forces that shaped these spaces, see Areli Marina, *The Italian Piazza Transformed: Parma in the Communal Age* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012).

³¹ Yi-fu Tuan argues that “awareness of the past is an important element in the love of place” (Yi-fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 99).

provided legitimacy for their discussion of a Church committed to the poor, and that such an action would in turn reaffirm the sanctity of the space.

By seeking to use the sacred nature of the cathedral to enhance their gesture, the Catholics of *I Protagonisti* also transformed the space. Upon entering the cathedral, the Catholics refused to sit in pews, eschewing the traditional orientation that focused attention toward the priest at the front of the sanctuary and limited the possibility for movement and discussion among the laity.³² By placing chairs in the nave, the historically public space within the church, the Catholics refused to assume a position of submission and passivity.³³ Arranging the chairs in a circle, they also spatially reinforced their desire to hold a broad and free-flowing discussion where no one voice, either lay Catholic or priest, male or female, young or old, or potentially even Catholic or non-Catholic, would dominate. As part of the circle, female lay Catholics had the same opportunity to discuss ideas regarding the direction of the Church as did male lay Catholics. Female members of *I Protagonisti* also sought to push back against what they felt was an overwhelming spirit of patriarchy in the Church by asking to participate in a conversation with the priest after the Mass. With the occupation, female lay Catholics not only sought to alter the gendered power dynamics within the cathedral, but also within the institutional Church.³⁴

During the heated debate that followed the occupation, the role the police played in the incident highlighted the contrasting conceptions among Catholics of how sacred space should be treated by forces of the state and underscored differences among Catholics regarding the ideal relationship between the Church and the Italian state. As Roger Friedland and Richard D. Hecht

³² Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 57-66.

³³ Sarah Stanbury and Virginia Chieffo Raguin, "Introduction," in *Women's Space: Patronage, Place, and Gender in the Medieval Church*, eds. Virginia Chieffo Raguin and Sarah Stanbury (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 5.

³⁴ T.J. Gorringer, *A Theology of the Built Environment: Justice, Empowerment, Redemption* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 32.

have argued, “the state stands at the profane perimeter of any sacred place as the guarantor of its sanctity.”³⁵ Many Catholics in Parma and throughout Italy supported the efforts of the police to clear the Catholic protestors from the cathedral. Their approval of such an action seemingly endorsed the close relationship that existed between the Italian state and the Holy See, which had been formalized with the Lateran Pacts in 1929 and reaffirmed in Article Seven of Italy’s Constitution in 1947.³⁶

Members of *I Protagonisti* and their allies and supporters, however, condemned the actions of the police, who they argued had “brutally intervened in the Church to throw [the Catholics] out.” For members of the group, the true scandal of the occupation was the decision of Church officials to treat “the cathedral as if it were a business and not also [their] house” and invite “the institution of repression (what is the police), into the Father’s house.”³⁷ With this critique, the Catholics accused the ecclesiastical hierarchy of Parma of taking an action that truly defiled the sacred nature of the cathedral. In addition, they blamed the Italian state for deciding which Catholics deserved to be in the cathedral. Instead of viewing the cathedral as a place open only to a select few, *I Protagonisti*’s conception of sacred space reflected a broader politics of inclusion.³⁸ In the days following the occupation, the debate among Catholics focused on more than just the actions and presence of Catholic protestors in the cathedral. The types of ideas that

³⁵ Roger Friedland and Richard D. Hecht, “The Politics of Sacred Space: Jerusalem’s Temple Mount/*al-haram al-sharif*,” in Jamie Scott and Paul Simpson-Housley, eds., *Sacred Place and Profane Spaces: Essays in the Geographics of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1991), 23.

³⁶ For more on the Lateran Pacts, see Christopher Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 226-227, and Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 386-387. For additional information on the heated battle surrounding Article 7 of Italy’s postwar constitution, see Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 101.

³⁷ Gruppo ‘i protagonisti’, *Cattedrale Occupata*, 22-23.

³⁸ In his investigation of the implications of a particular definition of sacred space in *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, Gerardus van der Leeuw posited that the creation of sacred space requires the drawing and policing of boundaries meant to limit entry to certain people. Thus, by its very nature, sacred space is exclusionary (Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, trans. J.E. Turner, foreword by Ninian Smart (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986): 210 and 395-396). For a more comprehensive discussion of sacred space, see the introduction to this dissertation.

were discussed, as well as their appropriateness for the space of the cathedral, also played a prominent role.

Beyond Parma, Catholics throughout Italy in the late 1960s launched fierce critiques of ecclesiastical officials' ties to economic and political elites. The subject of these protests often focused on the use of, and access to, churches. In Padua in northern Italy, a group of young Catholics protested the preparations for an extravagant wedding that meant "the church was literally occupied by decorators, musicians, electricians, florists" for three days. The group complained to the parish priest that the faithful were unable to pray at the high altar or participate in other religious acts during the preparations for the ceremony. When they stood outside the church on the day of the wedding holding signs that publicized their complaints, the Catholics were confronted by plainclothes police officers.³⁹

In Ponte Buggianese, a rural community west of Florence, a group of about fifty Catholic youth carried out a "peaceful invasion" of Our Lady of Good Counsel to challenge the use of parish funds for the commission of a large fresco by Piero Annigoni, a world-renowned portrait and fresco painter. In their manifesto, which they distributed to parishioners in the church and piazza, the Catholics argued "the church is not a theater that needs lights, flowers and frescoes to shine in all its magnificence and thus attract people. The church is a place of all and of prayer... The church is the house of the poor, of poor people." The group had come to Ponte Buggianese to speak to the villagers, to tell them they had "the courage to shout with [with the protestors] that the fresco that decorates [the] church is absurd, useless, garish; that it is a waste of money."⁴⁰ For many of the Catholic protestors in Padua, Ponte Buggianese, and elsewhere, the sacred character of churches had little to do with the majesty and beauty of the buildings'

³⁹ "Lettere al direttore," *Settegiorni*, October 5, 1968.

⁴⁰ "Il 'Dissenso' contro l'Arte: Contestato in una chiesa un affresco di Annigoni," *La Nazione sera*, March 10, 1969.

architecture or decorations.⁴¹ Instead, they believed the churches' sacred character came from the assembly of believers who chose to gather and worship. Many of the Catholics involved in these actions believed that the overwhelming majority of Church officials had become accustomed to their extravagant surroundings. In their protests, Catholics criticized members of the hierarchy and some parish priests for treating churches and cathedrals as if they were their own private property and for prioritizing the interests of the wealthy over those of the poor.

In Parma, members of *I Protagonisti* felt that a shock was needed to reinvigorate the Church by “actively putting in front of all the people of God a clear choice in favor of the poor against the established disorder.”⁴² During the occupation of the cathedral, they distributed flyers to the faithful arriving for Mass and other individuals outside in the piazza in which they criticized the Church hierarchy's support of and participation in an unjust and immoral capitalist system. Critics of the Parma occupation frequently condemned the act on the basis that Catholics had allegedly discussed extremist texts, many of which contained political and social, not religious content, in the cathedral. *Gazzetta di Parma* quoted individuals with close ties to the apostolic administration who argued that it was “absurd to want to transfer political criteria to the ecclesial plane.”⁴³ Some local groups even went so far as to send notices to newspapers disowning any responsibility for the action, which they considered a transgression of the boundary separating society's profane and sacred realms. According to *L'Avvenire D'Italia*, the group *Ezio Vanoni* publicly affirmed its identity as a political and cultural club and “rejected any

⁴¹ In the cities of Avellino, Sant'Agata dei Goti, and Florence in 1968 and 1969, individuals placed posters in church nativity scenes that depicted how the material realities of everyday life conflicted with the message of the Church. Criticisms of these protests of “sacred art” by residents of the towns and quarters focused on how the individuals responsible for the posters were propagating “class warfare” and blurring the “sacred and profane” (Falconi, *La contestazione nella Chiesa*, 308-309, 315).

⁴² “Documento d'occupazione N. 3,” *Cattedrale occupata*, 33.

⁴³ “Un gesto senza precedenti nella storia della nostra città,” *Gazzetta di Parma*, September 15, 1968.

connection of religious problems and the renewal of the Church with those of the development of civil society.”⁴⁴

While critics of the occupation claimed that political arguments were inappropriate for the sacred atmosphere of the Parma cathedral, one paper’s coverage of the incident noted that during the celebration of the Mass in the cathedral, Monsignor Rossolini used a political example to explicate the passage of the day, which focused on the resurrection of the young man from Nain, as told in the Gospel of Luke 7:11-17. In order to provide an example of one who sacrificed their life to the ideals of liberty, Rossolini read a letter written by a partisan to his wife in the moments before his execution.⁴⁵ As Paul Ginsborg has documented, the discussion of political issues and partisan themes within parish life, mainly via the various organizations of Catholic Action, during the 1950s was commonplace. Furthermore, the Church, as a temporal institution, enjoyed close ties to the ruling Christian Democratic Party in the immediate postwar era.⁴⁶ In reality, those who criticized the political nature of the Parma occupation were not upset that Catholics discussed certain topics and issues in the cathedral. Rather, they disagreed with the content of the discussions and the agendas of the discussants. During the heated atmosphere of the Cold War, many ecclesiastical officials viewed demands for the Church to adopt a “preferential option for the poor” as Marxism in disguise.⁴⁷ After the Vatican excommunicated all Catholics who held or advocated Communist, as well as anti-Christian, beliefs in July 1949, it remained vigilant in its quest to seek out and expel those who they believed were trying to reintroduce similar ideological positions. Thus, the debate surrounding the occupation of the

⁴⁴ “Severe condanne per l’occupazione della cattedrale,” *L’Avvenire D’Italia*, September 17, 1968, 6.

⁴⁵ “Un gesto senza precedenti nella storia della nostra città,” *Gazzetta di Parma*, September 15, 1968.

⁴⁶ Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 116-117, 168-169, and 176.

⁴⁷ The Conference of Latin American Bishops met in Medellin, Columbia in 1968. At the conference, the bishops institutionalized the “preferential option for the poor” as a mandatory decision each Christian must make about how they view the world and what steps they should take to work on behalf of the poor and oppressed. The conference’s final document was released on September 6, 1968, just two weeks before the occupation of the Parma cathedral.

Parma cathedral served for many as a proxy for heated clashes over the future of national and international politics.

Some critics of the occupation suggested that the Catholic protestors' mixture of political, social, and religious issues provided cover for the toxic presence of Communists, and to a lesser extent Protestants and atheists, within the cathedral. As one paper noted, "'observers' of the extreme left" who had assembled in the cathedral responded to challenges from other lay Catholics by stating they were "'baptized' ... with a tone of scorn," while "outside a crowd rushed from the cells of the PCI [the Italian Communist Party]."⁴⁸ According to other detractors, the Catholics who occupied the cathedral had been manipulated by sinister theologians whose "pseudo-theological affirmations... [had] launched in diaspora new Protestants."⁴⁹ With these portrayals of the Catholics involved in the incident, ecclesiastical officials and their like-minded political, cultural, and social allies sought to delegitimize members of *I Protagonisti* as, at worst, partisan wolves cloaking themselves in the trappings of the religious, or at best, naïve children easily duped by nefarious political and religious outsiders. Furthermore, they attempted to reaffirm the sacred space of cathedrals and churches, and the Church, as distinct from the topics and themes they considered to be profane, unseemly, and inappropriate.

Other critics associated the occupation of the cathedral with changes, which they viewed negatively, occurring within the Church and traditional Catholic societies around the world. Some blamed "modernist priests who got it in their heads to compete with communists by adopting their mentality, systems, and language."⁵⁰ While priests like Don Setti received a large burden of the blame for the occupation, other religious officials were not safe from criticism. Catholics who longed for a return to the pre-Vatican II Church also denounced members of the

⁴⁸ "Un gesto senza precedenti nella storia della nostra città," *Gazzetta di Parma*, September 15, 1968.

⁴⁹ "Teologia in piazza," *L'Avvenire D'Italia*, September 17, 1968, 6. Also printed in *Cattedrale Occupata*, 64-66.

⁵⁰ *Candido*, as cited in *Cattedrale Occupata*, 49.

hierarchy for “believing in adapting to the times, [who were] instead threatening to undermine the foundations on which its strength has rested for centuries: the hierarchy and obedience.”⁵¹ As these criticisms demonstrate, the presence and action of Catholic protestors in the Parma cathedral was viewed as not just a threat to the building’s sacred nature. Rather, the notion that Catholics would cloak what some deemed to be radical theological and political ideas in the guise of reform and renewal represented an even more pernicious threat to the foundation of the global Church.

In their response to critics and their charges, *I Protagonisti* insisted that the institutional Church, as well as individual ecclesiastical officials, terminate their close ties to wealth and power and serve the world’s poor and oppressed. They contended the true desecration of churches occurred when “the rich and the poor meet at the Eucharist table as equals, while in reality, at the table of the rich men of capitalist society there are millions of Lazzari left only with crumbs that have the name of exploitation, alienation, and sanctimonious [*farisaica*] charity.”⁵² In documents distributed and discussed during the occupation, as well as texts published in the weeks and months afterwards, members of *I Protagonisti* repeatedly focused on the Church hierarchy’s support of, and participation in, an unjust and immoral capitalist system. In a document titled “*Perché occupiamo la cattedrale*” (“Why we are occupying the cathedral”), the group objected to the use of funds from a local bank to build the church of Sant’Evasio and asked ecclesiastical officials to “make a distinctive choice in favor of the poor against the capitalist system.” They criticized the “economic discrepancies that exist[ed] among the priests

⁵¹ *Candido*, as cited in *Cattedrale Occupata*, 49. Giorgio Pisanò, one of the founders of the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI-Movimento Sociale Italiano) in 1947, revived *Candido* in 1968 and served as its manager until 1992. *Candido* had originally been founded by Giovannino Guareschi and ceased operation under his leadership in 1961.

⁵² “Documento d’occupazione N. 3,” *Cattedrale occupata*, 32. This was a reference to the parable of the Rich man and Lazarus found in Luke 16: 19-31.

of the Diocese,” which they considered to be a legacy of the hierarchy’s acceptance and promulgation of the “injustice of bourgeois society.” Members of *I Protagonisti* also condemned the continued use of diocesan funds to publish a weekly newspaper, *Vita Nuova*, which they viewed as a typical example of the “clerical-bourgeois press.” They argued that “these intolerable situations [were] the logical consequence” of the Church’s inclination towards “authoritarianism” and its close relationship with “established power,” exhibited by the Church’s concordat with the Italian government, which granted the Church the right to own property.⁵³ The group repeatedly asked ecclesiastical officials to make a choice between “those who are on the side of the Gospel of the poor, and those who serve two fathers: God and money.”⁵⁴ Members of *I Protagonisti* even sent an open letter to Pope Paul VI after the occupation, declaring they did “not see anything of the poor, free, and bold Church today, although we truly want it to be so.”⁵⁵

The debate that erupted throughout Italy in the days and weeks after the occupation of the Parma cathedral reflected lay Catholics’ struggle to live within the tensions of Catholic ecclesiology in the post-Vatican II era. Members of *I Protagonisti* and their critics shared the belief that the cathedral stood as the house of the “people of God.” They disagreed, however, over who most truly represented the new universalism in the Church best expressed by this conception of believers. As Brian Porter-Szűcs has argued in his examination of Catholicism in Poland, this issue was further complicated by the tendency of some people to conflate the concept of the people of God with “a degree of popular participation in (and ultimately even

⁵³ “Perché occupiamo la cattedrale,” *Cattedrale occupata*, 25. In addition to the four financial concerns, members of the group also protested the right of a bishop to “remove or promote a priest...without the faithful, those directly involved, being consulted” and they pleaded for “reform of seminaries to prevent them from continuing to graduate culturally brainwashed priests.”

⁵⁴ “Documento d’occupazione N.1,” *Cattedrale occupata*, 29.

⁵⁵ “Lettera aperta a Paolo VI,” *Cattedrale occupata*, 78.

ownership of) the Church.”⁵⁶ As lay Catholics were invested with increased significance and holiness in the post-Conciliar Church (as a member of the laity), their relationship to, and perception of, churches and cathedrals underwent a significant transformation.⁵⁷ As a result of these tensions and shifting relationships, members of *I Protagonisti* simultaneously articulated both pre- and post-Vatican II conceptions of sacred space during and after their occupation.

Those who condemned the occupation noted that the act of occupying the cathedral proscribed opportunities for discussion among Catholics. *Gazzetta di Parma* reported that individuals with close ties to the Parma archdiocese described the action as selfish since “every house of God is the house of all the people of God and not of twenty people.”⁵⁸ Writing in the *Corriere della Sera*, famed poet and academic Carlo Bo described the occupation as especially “absurd when the object of dispute is the very place of communion.”⁵⁹ Finally, *L’Avvenire D’Italia* argued the radical behavior of the Catholic protestors had “impeded the dialogue they [had] called for” and suggested, in a broadside at both the misguided energy of young Catholics and the recalcitrance of some church officials to engage in dialogue, that what was needed was more “‘good will’ and ‘holy courage’ within the structures of the Church and not within the architectural structures of the cathedral.”⁶⁰

According to various groups of lay Catholics and ecclesiastical officials, the occupation of the Parma cathedral not only stifled conversation among Catholics during the incident, it threatened unity and harmony within the broader Church. In the parish of Santa Maria della Pace, where Setti had been priest, the pastoral council released a statement clarifying their

⁵⁶ Brian Porter-Szűcs, *Faith and Fatherland: Catholicism, Modernity, and Poland* (New York: Oxford, 2011), 33.

⁵⁷ John C. Seitz, *No Closure: Catholic Practice and Boston’s Parish Shutdowns* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 37.

⁵⁸ “Un gesto senza precedenti nella storia della nostra città,” *Gazzetta di Parma*, September, 1968.

⁵⁹ Carlo Bo, “La Protesta in Chiesa,” *Corriere della Sera*, September 25, 1968.

⁶⁰ “Teologia in piazza,” *L’Avvenire D’Italia*, September 17, 1968, 6. This newspaper article can also be found in *Cattedrale Occupata*, 64-66.

relationship to *I Protagonisti* and disavowing the group's decision to occupy the cathedral. The council praised the group's goals but stressed its disagreement with the protestors' methodology because it risked the significant achievements made in the diocese and threatened to polarize the community. They feared that *I Protagonisti's* action would leave "the bishop in communion only with the most traditionalist forces."⁶¹ Five days after the occupation, Monsignor Amilcare Pasini, the apostolic administrator of the diocese of Parma, issued a letter to the priests and faithful. In it, he stressed the importance of dialogue between lay Catholics and church officials "through the greatest love and respect" and not with "attitudes of rupture." For Pasini, the group's decision to occupy the cathedral, "where the bishop presents the divine Word that gathers the people of God and celebrates the Eucharist that welds the faithful in an intense bond of unity and charity of the mystical body of Christ, demonstrate[d] a misunderstanding of the basic themes of fidelity to Christ and to the Church."⁶² On the same day that Pasini published his letter, Pope Paul VI, in an address to the faithful gathered in St. Peter's square, urged Catholics to ignore "a spirit of corrosive criticism that [had] become fashionable in some spheres of Catholic life." Referring to a spate of numerous recent incidents, including the occupations of cathedrals, protests against the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, the circulation of certain scandalous films, and acts of political violence, Paul VI asked "Where are the cohesion and the dignity of true Christians? Where is the sense of responsibility towards their own and towards others' Catholic profession? Where is the love for the Church?"⁶³

⁶¹ Beretta, *Il lungo autunno*, 153-154.

⁶² Boato, *Contro la chiesa di classe*, 227-228.

⁶³ Boato, *Contro la chiesa di classe*, 229-232. The Vatican issued Pope Paul VI's encyclical, *Humanae Vitae* ("Of Human Life"), on July 29th, 1968. Most notably, *Humanae Vitae* continued the Church's prohibition against the use of artificial contraception. With the issuing of the encyclical, Paul VI rejected the findings of the Pontifical Commission on Birth Control, a diverse body of theologians, physicians, lay Catholics (men and women), bishops, and cardinals that had been established by Pope John XXIII in 1963 and which Paul VI later expanded. While the encyclical was embraced by more traditionalist Catholics, many Catholics who were hoping the Church would adapt its positions and strategies to better engage with a dynamic world were repelled by the document. For more on

Members of *I Protagonisti* refuted claims like those put forth by Pasini and Paul VI, which portrayed the group as representing a direct challenge to ecclesiastical officials and unity within the Church. In a document discussed during the event, the group maintained they had repeatedly expressed their “respect and service to the Bishop in his functions as a pastor of the Diocese.”⁶⁴ They had refused a meeting before the occupation because ecclesiastical officials failed to recognize the group was “not making a gesture against a bishop or the hierarchy.” Instead of engaging seriously with members of *I Protagonisti*, the group believed Bishop Evasio Colli viewed their concerns about the Church as solely a challenge to his authority. They considered this type of “myopia” to be a common problem that plagued dioceses throughout the Catholic world, which prohibited productive discussion between members of the hierarchy and the laity.⁶⁵

Even if Bishop Colli or his representatives had been willing to meet with members of *I Protagonisti*, the group argued they were not interested in a private conversation. Instead, they sought a bigger stage and a more diverse audience for their discussion. Driven by years of theological study, members of the group sought to continue a process of dialogue endorsed by both the documents and spirit of Vatican II, which had, according to them, overturned “a conception of subordination and of ‘infantilism’ of the laity.”⁶⁶ They chose to occupy the Parma cathedral because they sought to engineer a meeting between themselves and other lay Catholics.

Humanae Vitae, the Pontifical Commission on Birth Control, and the reception of the encyclical, see: Robert McClory, *Turning Point: The Inside Story of the Papal Birth Control Commission, and How Humanae Vitae Changed the Life of Patty Crowley and the Future of the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1995); Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Joseph A. Komonchak, “[Humanae Vitae and Its Reception: Ecclesiological Reflections](#),” (cdn.theologicalstudies.met/39/39.2/39.2.1/pdf); James T. Bretzke, S.J., S.T.D., “[Humanae Vitae Select Bibliography](#),” (<https://www2.bc.edu/james-bretzke/HumanaeVitaeBibliography.pdf>).

⁶⁴ “Documento d’occupazione N.3,” *Cattedrale Occupata*, 32.

⁶⁵ Francesco Schianchi, as quoted in Beretta, *Il lungo autunno*, 147-148. Schianchi, a native of Parma who had gained notoriety during the student protests at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart (*l’Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore*) in Milan in November of the previous year, had developed a “relationship of friendship and collaboration” with members of *I Protagonisti* in the period before the occupation.

⁶⁶ *Cattedrale occupata*, 31.

They believed that their “methodology of rupture had the effectiveness of not reducing progress to the level of a group in contact with the bishop, but to actively put in front of all the people of God a clear choice in favor of the poor against the established disorder.”⁶⁷

Catholics involved in the three-hour long occupation sought to consecrate their beliefs and actions through participation in ritual acts of worship, such as the celebration of Mass or the reading of God’s word.⁶⁸ Engagement with other lay Catholics during these rituals enabled the group to use what Richard Kiechkefer has described as the “shared world of symbolic narratives and meanings” within the church to claim, as part of the people of God, their right to assemble in the sacred space of the cathedral.⁶⁹ When a Church official confronted members of *I Protagonisti* and other lay Catholics during the occupation and told them to leave the cathedral, they claimed that as “part of the people of God” they had a “right to remain in the church,” which was the “temple of the people of God,” to pray and debate with other Catholics.⁷⁰

This expanded sense of religious association had been modeled by the bishops, cardinals, observers, theological advisors, and lay Catholics who gathered in Rome during the Second Vatican Council, and articulated in the texts produced during this momentous happening in the history of the Church. During and after the occupation, members of *I Protagonisti* embodied an all-encompassing approach to their fellow Catholics and a more situational conception of sacred space that “located the sacred at the nexus of human practices and social projects.”⁷¹ Yet, at the same time, the desire of members of *I Protagonisti* to locate their discussion within the material confines of the cathedral also reflected a more traditional, pre-Vatican II, substantial conception

⁶⁷ *Cattedrale occupata*, 33.

⁶⁸ Chidester and Linenthal, *American Sacred Space*, 9-10.

⁶⁹ Richard Kiechkefer, *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 135.

⁷⁰ Beretta, *Il lungo autunno*, 148 and “Un gesto senza precedenti nella storia della nostra città,” *Gazzetta di Parma*, September 15, 1968.

⁷¹ Chidester and Linenthal, *American Sacred Space*, 5-9

of sacred space that recognized the power of certain places to transcend the temporal.⁷² Like their critics, Catholics involved in the occupation of, and protests in, churches and cathedrals throughout Italy viewed these sites as places invested with powerful religious, cultural, political, and social significance. A few years removed from the completion of the Second Vatican Council's fourth session in 1965, the debate surrounding the occupation of Parma's cathedral revealed the degree to which Catholics were still struggling to work through the radical changes that had altered their everyday existence and their conceptions of the Church.

3. Occupation as Protest in Postwar Italy

“I am nostalgic for the occupations of cathedrals. The year was 1968; and the Christians in Parma occupied the cathedral. An unbelievable act. The practice of occupation was not new; but it was a new kind: the occupation of a cathedral. We were familiar with the occupation of land, the great epic of the Sicilian peasants; we were familiar with the occupation of factories, a variation of the strikes and battles of labor; we were familiar with the occupation of schools; it was '68 and I remember once, I do not know if it was as a joke or for real, I was told that children had occupied the nursery school. But we were not familiar with the occupation of cathedrals. There was the precedent of Jesus, who had freed the temple of Jerusalem, but then Christianity had made sure that the churches should remain firmly in the hands of the clergy...But in the occupation of the cathedral in Parma another revolution also flowed, that of civil society, that of protest, that of '68.”⁷³

In the late 1960s, many Italians considered church occupations to be one manifestation of a broader phenomenon of the contestation of space that also disrupted higher education, agriculture, industry, and other spheres of postwar society. As Raniero La Valle noted in the quotation above, occupying a particular space as a method of social and political protest had been a common tactic deployed by laborers, peasants, and workers throughout Italy's brief national history. During the nineteenth century, peasant uprisings often led to the seizure and redistribution of estates. After World War One, returning soldiers asserted traditional claims and

⁷² For a more comprehensive discussion of the substantial vs situational views of sacred space, see the introduction to this dissertation.

⁷³ Raniero La Valle, as cited in *Il lungo autunno*, 149.

sought to collect on government promises by occupying uncultivated land, usually in southern Italy.⁷⁴ During this tumultuous interwar period marked by fierce social conflict, economic crisis, and political instability, the growth of radical unionism in Italy (particularly in the north) and elsewhere in Europe fueled workers' discontent. Crackdowns by industrialists only led to increased militancy, massive workers' strikes, and the occupation and self-management of factories and transport centers in 1920 and 1921.⁷⁵ Two decades later, the conclusion of World War Two in 1945 ushered in another moment of rupture and transition for Italians. In the years after the war, Italians witnessed intense clashes between peasants and landlords and violent struggles between workers and industrialists.⁷⁶ The frequency and intensity of occupations of uncultivated land and established estates, factories, and, in the 1960s, universities, both reflected and fueled political, cultural, regional, class, and generational divisions in Italy.

By the time of the occupation of the Parma cathedral in September 1968, occupation as a practice of protest was, as one historian of Italy has argued, “already well known (and almost well-worn).”⁷⁷ Many Italians and Catholics, especially ecclesiastical officials, viewed the

⁷⁴ Martin Clark, *Modern Italy, 1871 to the Present*, Third Edition (New York: Routledge, 2014), 251.

⁷⁵ For more on the *Biennio Rosso* (Two Red Years), see: P. Spriano, *L'Occupazione delle Fabbriche, Settembre 1920* (Turin: Einaudi, 1964); G. Maione, *Il Biennio Rosso. Autonomia e Spontaneità Operaia nel 1919-1920* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1975); T. Detti, “Il Biennio Rosso” in F. Levi, U. Levra, and N. Tranfaglia, eds. *Storia d'Italia: Il Mondo Contemporaneo* (2 vols) (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1978); Martin Clark, *The Failure of Revolution in Italy, 1919-1920* (Reading: Department of Italian Studies, University of Reading, 1973); R. Bianchi, *Pace, Pane, Terra. Il 1919 in Italia* (Roma: Odradek Edizioni, 2006).

⁷⁶ For a discussion of the peasant movement and agrarian reform in postwar Italy, particularly in southern Italy, see Ginsborg, *Contemporary Italy*, 122-140. For an examination of social conflict in rural central and southern Tuscany, see Dario Gaggio, “Before the Exodus: The Landscape of Social Struggle in Rural Tuscany, 1944-1960,” *The Journal of Modern History* 83 (June 2011): 319-345. For more on workers' occupations of factories, see chapters one and two of this dissertation, in which I discuss incidents in Florence in the 1950s and 1960s.

⁷⁷ Foot, “Looking back on Italy's ‘Long ‘68’,” in *Memories of 1968*, 104. In this chapter, John Foot examines the student movement in Italy during the late 1960s. While his observation about the ubiquity of occupation as a practice of protest occurs within this particular context, it is also applicable to discussions of other occupations, such as those of estates, factories, and churches. For more on the origins and chronology of the Italian student movement, see: Carlo Oliva and Aloisio Rendi, *Il movimento studentesco e le sue lotte* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1969); Walter Tobagi, *Storia del movimento studentesco e dei marxisti-leninisti in Italia* (Milan: Sugar, 1970); Luisa Cortese, ed. *Il movimento studentesco: storia e documenti (1968-1973)* (Milan: Bompiani, 1973); Gianfranco Camboni and Danilo Samsa, *PCI e movimento degli studenti (1968-1973): ceti medi e strategie delle riforme* (Bari: DeDonato, 1975); Mino Monicelli, *L'ultrasinistra in Italia, 1968-1978*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1978).

behavior of, and ideas expressed by, Catholic protestors through lenses tinted by their opinions regarding occupations of factories and universities since the end of World War Two. In this section, I analyze the motivations and actions of those who occupied churches and universities in the 1960s. I argue that while Italians involved in these occupations shared a similar perspective towards the symbolic importance and nature of key spaces, they often approached and behaved within occupied spaces in diverse ways. The occupiers of churches and universities challenged traditional practices and customs that dictated who had the authority to speak and the topics to be discussed. Catholics and students occupied churches and university buildings to foster debate of pressing issues amongst themselves and to spur dialogue with others in Italian society, including ecclesiastical and educational officials. Yet, Catholics and students used diverse methods to occupy their respective arenas of discussion. For many Italians, actual and perceived intellectual, social, and political collaboration with students involved in the occupation of universities confirmed deep-seated fears about the motivations behind Catholic protestors' actions when they occupied churches. In some cases, these perceived or actual associations limited the possibility for actual dialogue to occur between lay Catholics and Church officials.

By the late 1960s, a strong connection existed between a radical strain of political Catholicism and the student movement. While Cold War tensions between the East and the West still dominated national and global strategic thinking, the Second Vatican Council and efforts to diminish Stalin's legacy in the Soviet Union created a religious and socio-political climate ripe for dialogue between Christians and Marxists. In 1964, two intellectuals, one Marxist and one Catholic, edited *Il dialogo alla prova*, which contained essays written by both Marxists and Catholics.⁷⁸ Catholic theologians and intellectuals also provided some powerful texts read and

⁷⁸ Lucio Lombardo Radice and Mario Gozzini, eds. *Il dialogo alla prova: Cattolici e comunisti italiani* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1964). Radice was the Marxist and Gozzini the Catholic.

used by Catholic and non-Catholic protestors. In May 1967, a brief book, *Lettera a una professoressa* (*Letter to a School-teacher*), was published. Purportedly written by eight students of Don Lorenzo Milani in the isolated mountain village of Barbiana, *Lettera a una professoressa* condemned the country's unjust socioeconomic system that favored the children of the rich. It also called for parents and students to organize so they could transform Italian society.⁷⁹ As Robert Lumley notes, *Lettera a una professoressa* quickly became one of, if not the, "single most influential text[s] in the student movement."⁸⁰

As if these shared intellectual sources were not enough to influence the views of many Italians, some of the leaders of the student movement and extra-parliamentary left organizations had been raised in the Church or were even practicing Catholics. A few of these individuals also participated in the occupations of, or protests within, churches. In Parma, Francesco Schianchi's earlier involvement in the occupation of Milan's Catholic University colored many local Catholics' interpretations of the occupation of the city's cathedral.⁸¹ The timing of protests in Parma also suggested a connection between the student movement and what was labeled as Catholic "dissent." In August 1968, one month before the occupation of the cathedral, ten students carried out a five-day long seizure of the city's university.⁸²

In Trent, Paolo Sorbi represents another example of an individual who participated in the occupation of, and protests within, both universities and churches. Unlike in France, where

⁷⁹ For more on Milani's life and work, see: Mario Lancisi, *Dopo la "lettera," Don Milani e la contestazione studentesca* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1980); Gruppo Don Milani Calenzano, *Don Lorenzo Milani. Riflessioni e testimonianze* (Florence: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1988); Neera Fallaci, *Vita del prete Lorenzo Milani: Dalla parte dell'ultimo* (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1993); Giorgio Pecorini, *Don Milani! Chi era costui?* (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi, 1998); Bruno Becchi, *Lassù a Barbiana ieri e oggi: Studi, interventi, testimonianze su don Lorenzo Milani* (Florence: Polistampa, 2004); Michele Gesualdi, ed. *Lettere di don Lorenzo Milani. Priore di Barbiana* (Rome: San Paolo Edizioni, 2007).

⁸⁰ Robert Lumley, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (London: Verso, 1990), 82.

⁸¹ In December 1967, Rudi Dutschke and a group of other students and anti-Vietnam activists disrupted a midnight Christmas service at the Kaiser Wilhelm Church in West Berlin (Slobodian, *Foreign Front*, 164). According to media reports of the incident, a parishioner attacked Dutschke, who had to seek medical treatment for his injuries (*Glasgow Herald*, December 26, 1967, 6).

⁸² Beretta, *Il lungo autunno*, 146.

student and worker protests erupted in May 1968, student protests in Italy began in January 1966 when students in Trent decided to occupy the city university's Institute of Sociology. Students voted to occupy the Institute of Sociology after the Italian legislature decided to prohibit students from graduating with a degree in sociology, choosing instead to offer a more general degree while acknowledging an emphasis in sociology. The occupation of January 1966 was the first of three occupations at the university, with the others occurring from October 22 to November 7, 1966 and from January 31 to April 7, 1968.⁸³ Sorbi participated in the occupations in Trent and later joined *Lotta continua*, an influential and radical leftist group in the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁸⁴ On March 26, 1968, Sorbi interrupted a Lenten sermon in the crowded cathedral of Trent by denouncing the priest as a liar and his messages as falsehoods. After a group of parishioners forcibly ejected Sorbi and other students from the church, he was besieged by police agents. He explained his disruption by denouncing the inauthenticity of sermons "that have nothing of the Gospel and that continue to betray the liberating message of the [Second Vatican] Council." He viewed his effort as the "beginning of an initiative that will inspire other religious actions and attempt to break the stagnation that has settled in Italy after the Council." Sorbi did not consider himself to be a rebel, but a devout Catholic who acted to save the Church from

⁸³ Horn, *The Spirit of '68*, 74-92. For more on the origins and chronology of the Italian student movement, see: Alessandro Chini, *Il dissenso cattolico. Dal postconcilio al referendum sul divorzio in Italia e a Trento* (Trento: Edizioni U.C.T., 2009); Carlo Oliva and Aloisio Rendi, *Il movimento studentesco e le sue lotte* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1969); Walter Tobagi, *Storia del movimento studentesco e dei marxisti-leninisti in Italia* (Milan: Sugar, 1970); Luisa Cortese, ed. *Il movimento studentesco: storia e documenti (1968-1973)* (Milan: Bompiani, 1973); Gianfranco Camboni and Danilo Samsa, *PCI e movimento degli studenti (1968-1973): ceti medi e strategie delle riforme* (Bari: DeDonato, 1975); Mino Monicelli, *L'ultrasinistra in Italia, 1968-1978* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1978).

⁸⁴ For a discussion of the role of Catholicism and Catholics in *Lotta continua*, see Richard Drake, "Catholics and the Italian Revolutionary Left of the 1960s," *The Catholic Historical Review* Volume 94, Number 3 (July 2008): 470-475. Sorbi left *Lotta continua* in 1975.

being “manipulated by its priests,” a process that had led to an atmosphere of “false renewal” in Italy in the late 1960s.⁸⁵

In the days following Sorbi’s action, Trent’s Duomo became a site of debate and contestation. An established group of young Catholics (the majority of which were local university students) dedicated to the study of the Council and its promise of renewal demonstrated their support for Sorbi’s act and message by carrying out similar protests in and outside the cathedral. From March 27-29, the group gathered in the church with the other faithful for Lenten services. Each day, when the preacher began his homily, they stood up and silently exited. Once outside on the cathedral’s steps, they read passages from notable Italian Catholic intellectuals, including priests Lorenzo Milani and Ernesto Balducci.⁸⁶ Balducci, who hailed from Tuscany, had worked closely with Lorenzo Milani and Florentine mayor Giorgio La Pira and founded the magazine *Testimonianze* in 1958. Balducci was also actively involved in the debate over conscientious objection in the early 1960s, an activity that led to his exile from Florence by Archbishop Florit.⁸⁷ Sorbi and his fellow students also discussed religious, political, and social themes with other interested Catholics and non-Catholics. On March 29, a confrontation between the group of Catholic students and those opposed to their protests erupted in the piazza, ultimately leading to a night-long siege of the university.⁸⁸

Other incidents made it easier for many Italians to associate protests within churches to the student protest movement. Nearly one year after Paolo Sorbi stood up in the Trent cathedral, a Sardinian painter and architect, Giuseppe Manos, interrupted the celebration of Mass in the

⁸⁵ Marco Boato, ed., *Contro la chiesa di classe: documenti della contestazione ecclesiale in Italia*, 30-31. See also Horn, *The Spirit of Vatican II*, 205-206; Imarisio Marco, “L’urlo in Duomo e il ’68, l’ex ribelle si scusa,” *Corriere della Sera*, November 21, 2005, 20; and Beretta, *Il lungo autunno*, 74-81.

⁸⁶ Boato, ed., *Contro la chiesa di classe*, 30-31.

⁸⁷ Balducci died in April 1992. He was a prolific writer and many texts have been written about his life and work. To explore Balducci’s significance for Tuscan and Italian Catholicism, as well as Italian politics in the postwar era, see the website for *La Fondazione Ernesto Balducci* (<http://www.fondazionebalducci.it/>).

⁸⁸ Boato, ed., *Contro la chiesa di classe*, 30-32.

church of Santa Rita da Cascia in Milan. As the priest began to discuss the significance of *Giornata per l'Università Cattolica*, the annual event when the faithful donated funds to maintain Italy's Catholic university founded in 1921 and located in Milan, Manos reportedly shouted "this is not the Church of the poor but the Church of the rich" and "it is not the Church of Christ, but the mammon Church." After a small group of religious officials and lay Catholics dragged Manos outside, tearing his shirt in the process, he was questioned by police officials. Later, in an interview with a journalist, Manos explained why he chose to speak out:

If I shouted in church during the religious function it was because I felt an impulse of irrepressible protest arrive in my heart. I am a practicing Catholic and this morning I went to church for the Mass, as I do every morning. Immediately after the Gospel, which was about the beautiful miracle of Lazarus, the priest read a message regarding the protest at the Catholic university. It seemed to me that he was urging the faithful to give their money because only this could restore the situation at the Catholic university and stop the contestation. But as I have said, can one discuss such things in church? I could not help myself and I shouted.⁸⁹

Several days before Manos disrupted the service, students in Milan had once again occupied Cattolica. First occupied in November 1967, it was not the first Italian university to be the site of student protests. Nonetheless, students' actions "sent shockwaves through Italian Catholic society" as Milan's Catholic University stood as a sacred symbol of national faith for many Italians.⁹⁰

In March 1969, the month of Manos' protest, some Catholics affiliated with the Church hierarchy harshly attacked those involved in the latest occupation of Cattolica. *L'Osservatore Romano*, a semi-official publication of the Vatican, declared the occupation to be a "brutal abuse of power towards all the other students as well as academic authorities and their offices." For

⁸⁹ "Grida in chiesa frasi di dissenso," *La Nazione*, March 24, 1969

⁹⁰ Stuart J. Hilwig, *Italy and 1968: Youthful Unrest and Democratic Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 77. The occupation of Cattolica began as a series of student strikes in response to a steep increase in fees. The strikes quickly grew into widespread support for an occupation after university officials refused to discuss students' concerns.

Catholic officials, the fact that “the unbearable abuse of a group of agitators” occurred on the eve of university day “emphasized the suspect wickedness” of the occupation.⁹¹ Pope Paul VI, who had previously spoken about the dangers of dissent and the threat it posed to the Church, discussed the disturbances at Milan’s Catholic University as well as the unrest within Italian universities and the Church on several different occasions during the last week of March.⁹² As Stuart J. Hilwig has argued in his study of 1968 in Turin, Paul VI sought to understand the issues important to students and young Catholics but also encouraged caution and patience.⁹³ On March 23, 1969, university day, the pope argued that Cattolica had a “mission of culture and civilization that touches the interests and duties” of all Italians. In his message to the faithful, Paul VI hoped for a peaceful and productive solution to the problems that plagued the nation’s educational system.⁹⁴ A week later, the pope addressed several thousand faithful in St. Peter’s Square. In a homily dedicated to the theme of youth, Paul VI acknowledged the anxieties and realities young Italians faced and the temptation for them to be caught up in “this hour of intellectual and social disturbance.” The pope emphasized, however, that young Catholics should focus on carrying out their primary role in society, which was spreading the good news about Christ.⁹⁵ By the end of 1969, Church resistance to student initiatives and changes in the focus of the student movement had led to the decline of protests at Milan’s Catholic University.⁹⁶

Italians involved in the occupations of universities and churches shared a similar perspective towards the symbolic importance of the spaces they chose as the site of their protests.

⁹¹ As quoted in “Una nota del giornale Vaticano: Denunciata la sopraffazione delle minoranze contestatrici,” *La Nazione*, March 22, 1969.

⁹² “Il messaggio natalizio del Papa: Paolo VI insiste contro il dissenso cattolico,” *Unità*, December 20, 1968; “Il Papa: riforma interior non folle contestazione,” *La Nazione*, January 15, 1969; “Paolo VI al card. Koenig: ‘L’ordine è minacciato,’” *Unità*, January 15, 1969; “Con un discorso sulle ‘arbitrarie intenzioni’ tratte dal Concilio: ‘Inconcepibile’ per Paolo VI la ‘repubblica conciliare,’” *Avanti*, January 16, 1969.

⁹³ Hilwig, *Italy and 1968*, 77-79.

⁹⁴ “Il Papa invita ad aiutare l’università cattolica,” *La Nazione*, March 24, 1969.

⁹⁵ “Il Papa in San Pietro parla della contestazione giovanile,” *La Nazione*, March 31, 1969.

⁹⁶ Lumley, *States of Emergency*, 77-85.

In her innovative and influential study of memory and 1968 in Italy, Luisa Passerini argues that the Palazzo Campana, which housed the humanities departments at the University of Turin and was occupied on November 27, 1967, “was a physical space, a structural space, a didactic space... But above all, it was a place of freedom of speech, a discursive and communicative space, for the students among themselves and with the outside world.”⁹⁷ As the churches occupied and protested within by Catholics represented a sacred material center of their faith, universities physically and symbolically stood as the heart of students’ intellectual and social reality. In part, students in Turin chose the humanities faculty, as Catholics in Parma chose the cathedral, as the space to occupy because of its central location and symbolic importance in the city.⁹⁸ In their quest to resolve the ills of the country’s educational, socioeconomic, and political systems, students sought to infuse their action with the legitimacy provided by the space of the university. The public, sacred, and symbolic space of churches and university buildings allowed both Catholic and student occupiers to discuss and debate issues of importance, both with themselves and with, on occasion, authority figures, including members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy or university administration.

How Catholic and student occupiers attempted to achieve the creation of these “discursive and communicative spaces,” however, differed significantly. In some cases, as in Parma, Catholics sought to join their fellow lay Catholics in prayer and suspended discussion and debate to participate in religious services led by ecclesiastical officials. In other incidents, such as in Trent and Milan, Catholics disrupted religious services with verbal outbursts that sought to counter what was seen as biased and harmful interpretations of both current events and

⁹⁷ Luisa Passerini, *Autobiography of a Generation: Italy, 1968* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 72.

⁹⁸ Passerini, *Autobiography*, 69. On a more logistical level, Passerini notes that the humanities faculty building included numerous halls which allowed students to hold both large assemblies and smaller meetings for committees and working groups.

the Gospel. In most cases, Catholic occupiers and protesters were physically ejected from churches by officials of the state or other lay Catholics. Catholics refused requests to leave churches and passively resisted efforts to terminate their discussions and protests, but they did not attempt to physically control the sacred space of churches.

Globally, the most notable exception to this practice occurred in Santiago, Chile, when approximately 250 Catholics, including university students, young priests, and a few nuns, occupied the city's historic cathedral in the early morning hours of August 11, 1968 to protest against the policies of the Catholic Church in Latin America and the imminent visit of Pope Paul VI to Bogota, Columbia. As in Parma, the Catholics in Santiago chose the cathedral because of its communal and historical nature and its significance as a space that belonged to all Catholics.⁹⁹ However, unlike in Parma, where Catholic protestors sought to interact with other lay Catholics and members of the hierarchy, Catholics involved in the fourteen-hour occupation in Santiago were alone within the cathedral. One newspaper account of the event described the Catholics as blocking the entrances to the cathedral and stationing guards throughout the building.¹⁰⁰ To spread information about their motivations and goals, the Catholics held a press conference near the high altar. They also allowed photographers to document their discussions about the state of the Church and society around the high altar, the singing of folk songs, and the celebration of Mass by one of the protesting priests, which included communal bread and wine. Although the

⁹⁹ "L'occupazione della cattedrale di Santiago," in *American Latina*, 220-221. The Catholics had originally planned to take over the archdiocese's radio station to broadcast a series of messages and discuss documents produced by a local "Young Church" movement. During the occupation, they declared in a document distributed to people outside the cathedral that they knew their action would be perceived as "a violent gesture" and that "many will be scandalized by the process." Given their limited opportunities to dialogue with ecclesiastical officials, these Catholics argued their "assembly in the cathedral [was] an evident and public act." During the celebration of the Mass, the Catholics discussed a variety of topics, including the suffering masses in Biafra (a secessionist region of Nigeria), those who had died as a result of the unjust war in Vietnam, the working-class people of Latin America, political prisoners in Brazil, and others throughout Latin America who were waging wars of independence.

¹⁰⁰ "Occupano per 'protesta' la cattedrale di Santiago," *La Nazione*, August 13, 1968.

cathedral had been surrounded by police agents, the vicar general of Santiago refused to give them permission to enter the building and end the occupation.¹⁰¹

Unlike Catholics involved in occupations of, and protests within, Italian churches, students in Turin and elsewhere throughout Italy tended to view universities as spaces that needed to be conquered and controlled in order to provide the proper opportunity and atmosphere for discussion and debate.¹⁰² Students often barricaded themselves within buildings and remained for days, if not weeks.¹⁰³ During these occupations, students ate, slept, sang, crafted manifestos, and met together as equals, inscribing new physical and social relations in lecture halls, classrooms, libraries, and cafeterias in ways far more materially obvious than Catholics did in occupied churches.¹⁰⁴ These activities transformed common university spaces into a “political and physical home for students.”¹⁰⁵ As a result of this close cohabitation in confined spaces, and the isolated nature of students’ existence, university buildings were often cluttered with the mundane realities of life at the end of occupations. One police officer involved in the ejection of student occupiers in Turin later remembered the university buildings to be “filled with broken chairs and litter, and the restrooms were covered with filth and used prophylactics—really a total mess.”¹⁰⁶ During the occupation of university buildings, the surrounding areas often became sites

¹⁰¹ “Occupano per ‘protesta’ la cattedrale di Santiago,” *La Nazione*, August 13, 1968 and “Lasciata dagli occupant la cattedrale di Santiago,” *La Nazione*, August 13, 1968.

¹⁰² Passerini, *Autobiography*, 67-72.

¹⁰³ In the United States, African American students at Cornell occupied the university’s student union, Willard Straight Hall on April 19, 1969. After evicting parents of students who had been sleeping in the union during parent’s weekend, and resisting an attempt by some Cornell fraternity students to end the protest, some student protestors armed themselves with firearms supplied by sympathizers (see Ian Wilhelm, “Ripples From a Protest Past,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 17, 2016 and Donald A. Downs, *Cornell ’69: Liberalism and the Crisis of the American University* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1999).

¹⁰⁴ Lumley, *States of Emergency*, 80 and Passerini, *Autobiography*, 71-72.

¹⁰⁵ Deborah Cohen and Lessie Jo Frazier, “Talking Back to ’68: Gendered Narratives, Participatory Spaces, and Political Cultures,” in *Gender and Sexuality in 1968*, 163.

¹⁰⁶ Armando Altomare, as cited in Stuart J. Hilwig, “An Oral History of Memories of 1968 in Italy,” in *Memories of 1968: International Perspectives*, eds. Ingo Cornils and Sarah Waters (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2010), 227. Hilwig notes how this officer’s recollection of the situation in Turin in 1968 often fluctuated between a detached, official perspective and those of an individual disgusted by the behavior of the students.

of contestation, with students taking over bars and houses and marking the area with the appearance of new bookstores and graffiti scrawled on walls.¹⁰⁷

In the early phases of the student movement in Italy, students employed sit-ins and teach-ins during lectures, which they had borrowed from student groups in the United States, and passively responded to police interventions.¹⁰⁸ This peaceful dynamic ended with the battle of Valle Giulia on March 1, 1968, when students clashed with police outside the faculty of architecture on the campus of Rome's La Sapienza University.¹⁰⁹ Throughout March, students occupied hundreds of academic buildings, centers, and universities and engaged in fierce street fights with police and groups of counter-protesting Fascists.¹¹⁰ No similar pattern of violent resistance occurred as a result of church occupations in Italy. Writing in 1969, Carlo Falconi argued the only violence during church occupations was propagated by the police who were "called to restore order by a lost and concerned hierarchy."¹¹¹ Nonetheless, tense standoffs often occurred inside and outside of churches as a result of occupations and protests.¹¹²

Students who occupied universities and Catholics who occupied and protested within churches frequently condemned the collusion between the Italian state and educational and religious officials. In Parma, although members of *I Protagonisti* had notified the police of their plan to occupy the city's cathedral, they expressed surprise "that the ties of the local Church with

¹⁰⁷ Foot, "Looking back on Italy's 'Long '68,'" in *Memories of 1968*, 107.

¹⁰⁸ Jan Kurz and Marica Tolomelli, "Italy," in Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth, eds. *1968 in Europe*, 90.

¹⁰⁹ Portelli, *The Battle of Valle Giulia*, 192-193.

¹¹⁰ Horn, *The Spirit of '68*, 84; Lumley, *States of Emergency*, 87; and Donatella della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 26-27.

¹¹¹ Carlo Falconi, *La contestazione nella Chiesa* (Milan: Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore, 1969), 309.

¹¹² Examples of these clashes include the events in Trent after Paolo Sorbi's interruption of the sermon discussed in this section and the protest in Ponte Buggianese analyzed in section 2b of this chapter. Violence played a key role in the actions and theology of certain individuals and movements throughout the Catholic world, especially in Latin America, during the 1960s. For example, Camillo Torres, the Colombian-born and Belgian-educated priest who frequently clashed with Church authorities and ultimately asked to be laicized, died fighting in the Columbian mountains as a member of the Army of National Liberation. As Richard Drake notes, Torres' advocacy of a revolt against global capitalism was tremendously influential among certain European Catholic groups (Drake, "Catholics and the Italian Revolutionary Left," 468).

the police were so close, efficient and immediate.”¹¹³ They later admitted they had underestimated the power of the bishop, who had in their view allowed the police to violate the traditional right of sanctuary within the cathedral. In a similar fashion, many students and professors were shocked at the sight of police violating the sanctity of university buildings by entering them to forcibly evict student protestors.¹¹⁴ In response to the occupations of universities and churches, legal authorities commonly indicted students and Catholics for criminal acts, including the disruption of academic activities and religious services. In Trent, authorities charged Paolo Sorbi with disturbing religious functions and twenty-six other students were denounced for the holding of an unauthorized public meeting.¹¹⁵ While authorities generally dropped these charges after several rounds of hearings and trials, student activists and Catholic protestors believed these legal proceedings were what Passerini has described as “another move in the battle over spaces.”¹¹⁶

Catholics engaged in efforts to reform the global Church in the late 1960s frequently encountered not just resistance from members of the hierarchy and agents of the state, but also a limited vision of what the sacred space of churches could represent. In the United States, James Groppi, a priest and civil rights activist in Milwaukee, argued that the “concept of sacred place creates a barrier between the Church and this world, closes the temple more or less like an abandoned building, committing it to a less than minimal role in the life of the Church.”¹¹⁷ In

¹¹³ Boato, ed. *Contro la chiesa di classe*, 216-217.

¹¹⁴ Hilwig, “An Oral History of Memories of 1968 in Italy,” in *Memories of 1968*, 234. For more on the different styles of protest policing in the postwar era in Italy, see Della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State*, 58-63.

¹¹⁵ Boato, ed., *Contro la chiesa di classe*, 31-32. Sorbi was denounced for “interrupting the priest in a loud voice—who having arrived at the Gospel was delivering the Lenten sermon—with the words ‘this father is not honest, I ask to speak...’ and continuing to make a racket, so much so that some faithful, outraged by his behavior, chased him out of the church” in accordance with Article 405 of the Penal Code.

¹¹⁶ Passerini, *Autobiography*, 70.

¹¹⁷ James Groppi, “The Church and Civil Rights,” in *La Chiesa sotterraneo*, ed. Malcolm Boyd (Milan: Jaca Book, 1968), 69.

Italy, journalist, intellectual, and theologian Adriana Zarri provided a full-throated attack of the hierarchy's limited conception of sacred space in an article published nearly two months after the Parma occupation. In an age when only twenty percent of Italians regularly attended Sunday Mass, Zarri hoped for a day when priests "accustomed to empty churches or those frequented by a few elderly women, will arrive... in a cathedral full of informed youth discussing the problems of the Church." Zarri considered it an "amazing sign" that young Catholics chose to "go to church to speak of the Church," even if they did so with an "absolute moral rigor, an often brutal sincerity, [and] a sometimes ruthless intransigence" common among youthful idealists. Yet Zarri was not sure some Italians and members of the Church hierarchy were ready for this "wonderful phenomenon" since they "do not complain of empty churches and complain about occupied churches, [and they] do not complain of disinterested protest and complain about passionate protest."¹¹⁸

4. Conclusion

Members of *I Protagonisti* and other lay Catholics chose to occupy the Parma cathedral because of its position as the spiritual and communal heart of the city. The group knew that the occupation would be perceived by some Catholics and non-Catholics as a transgression of social and religious norms, but nonetheless felt that such an action was needed to reinvigorate the Church. They also argued that this dramatic incident reaffirmed the sacredness and importance of the cathedral and the Church in a rapidly changing society. While the lay Catholics in *I Protagonisti* considered the cathedral to be the appropriate space to discuss their concerns regarding the institutional Church's alliance with economic, social, and political elites, other Catholics, especially ecclesiastical officials, felt such discussions profaned the church's sacred character. Critics depicted the occupiers as acting in rebellious ways and claimed they had

¹¹⁸ Adriana Zarri, "Fuori dal grigiore," *Settegiorni*, November 3, 1968.

debated political texts that had no place in a church (or the Church). Finally, they denounced the occupation as a selfish act that threatened the harmony of both the local and global Church.

In his analysis of protest within the Catholic Church in the late 1960s, Carlo Falconi noted the “cliché of the Parma occupation became practically normative for every subsequent church occupation that occurred” in Italy. During later occupations in Milan, Rome, and Genoa, Catholics recited prayers, discussed religious and political texts, and faced challenges from ecclesiastical and judicial officials.¹¹⁹ While these occupations were generally performed by a small number of Catholics who did not attempt to control the space within the churches or interfere with regularly scheduled religious celebrations, cultural observers such as Falconi and Lidia Menapace nonetheless highlighted their symbolic importance.¹²⁰ By gathering in cathedrals in major cities, Catholics projected their visions of a Church open to dialogue and devoted to the poor in a highly public manner, especially when religious officials ordered the physical eviction of Catholics. Yet Catholics carried out diverse protests within and outside churches throughout Italy that did not conform to the cliché of the Parma occupation described by Falconi. By interrupting religious services and distributing pamphlets to other members of the faithful, these Catholics demanded greater involvement in deciding who should be able to speak and gather in a church and what they should be able to say and discuss. Unfortunately for these Catholics, ecclesiastical officials and other critics often conflated the goals and methods of Catholic protestors with those of the student movement. The failure, or unwillingness, of officials within the Church to recognize important distinctions between these groups fueled the circulation of negative characterizations of Catholics’ motives and actions.

¹¹⁹ Falconi, *La contestazione nella Chiesa*, 300.

¹²⁰ Falconi, *La contestazione nella Chiesa*, 300 and Lidia Menapace, “La Cattedrale ‘occupata,’” in *Settegiorni*, September 22, 1968.

Within this poisoned atmosphere, which was enhanced by the tensions of post-Vatican II Catholics' relationships to sacred space, the possibility for various groups and factions within the Church to seek dialogue and achieve solutions amenable to all was highly limited, if not impossible. Eight days after the occupation of the Parma cathedral, similar conflicts and pressures would ignite a fierce conflict in the Florentine community of Isolotto that would eclipse the clashes in Parma, capture the attention of the Catholic world for over a year, and threaten to destroy a thriving community of believers.

Chapter V

The Church is Not a church

I. Introduction

The dramatic occupation of the Parma cathedral on September 14, 1968 shocked Italian society and triggered debate in parishes throughout the country. In the Florentine community of Isolotto, members of the faithful had routinely gathered for years in the church after the celebration of Mass to discuss current events. On Sunday, September 15, the recent events in Parma dominated the conversation. By the end of that day's discussion, those in attendance decided to contact the group of Catholics in Parma and to draft a letter expressing their solidarity with the action carried out the previous week.¹ The public circulation of the community's letter and Cardinal Florit's subsequent response sparked a fierce clash that raged throughout Florence and fueled the tumult within the Catholic world during the autumn of 1968 and much of 1969. For those familiar with the previous actions of the religious community in Isolotto, the fierce resistance they faced surprised few given the combustible relationship that existed with the Florentine religious hierarchy.

For nearly fifteen years, many of the faithful in Isolotto had labored to create an inclusive society based on the example of Christ found in the Gospels. As their communal walk was strengthened by the events, documents, and spirit of the Second Vatican Council, they began to increasingly encounter resistance to their ideas and actions from the diocese's leadership, particularly Cardinal Archbishop Florit. As a result of previous disputes over religious, political, and social issues, both parties viewed each other with wariness. With the clash over the Parma

¹ Comunità dell'Isolotto, *Isolotto: 1954-1969* (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1969), 151-152.

incident, it became clear to those in Isolotto and other nearby parishes that Florit's targeting of Mazzi, which had become more pronounced during a dispute over the administrative city election in 1966, had reached a new and serious level.²

Tensions in Florence were heightened by the turmoil happening in Italy and throughout the Catholic and non-Catholic world in the autumn of 1968. On August 11, over two hundred Catholics, including university students, young priests, and a few nuns, occupied the cathedral in Santiago, Chile to protest against the policies of the Catholic Church in Latin America and the imminent visit of Pope Paul VI to Columbia for the opening of the Second General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops later that month.³ In late September and early October in Italy, striking workers and their supporters in both Pisa and Milan faced violent acts of repression by the police. On October 2, government troops massacred approximately four hundred students and civilians, who had gathered with thousands of others in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in Mexico City to protest the regime's authoritarian response to student protests.⁴ In November, priests in the Basque region of Spain locked themselves into the seminary of Derio to protest the way Franco's regime had punished other priests for their opposition to the dictatorship.⁵

Within a global society rocked by repeated flashpoints of discord, the situation in Isolotto during the autumn of 1968 nonetheless attracted international attention. Unlike many other

² *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 159.

³ Roberto Magni e Livio Zanotti, eds., *American latina: la Chiesa si contesta* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1969). The Medellin Conference, as the event is more popularly recalled, resulted in the bishops of Latin America supporting the notion of the "preferential option for the poor" as well as the formation of Christian "base communities" to aid in the physical and spiritual advancement of the disenfranchised and poor. The Medellin Conference played a crucial role in the development and spread of Liberation Theology.

⁴ Elaine Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power, and Terror in 1968 Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 1. Two weeks later, US Olympians Tommie Smith and John Carlos each raised a black-gloved fist during the playing of the national anthem during the awards ceremony for the 200-meter competition in Olympic Stadium in Mexico City.

⁵ Gorka Aulestia, *Improvisational Poetry from the Basque Country*, trans. Lisa Corcostegui and Linda White (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1995), 187.

protests that struck the institutional Church like quick and brilliant lightning bolts but caused little lasting damage, the events in Isolotto created a firestorm that would rage hotter and brighter as the months passed. Isolotto's parish church stood at the center of this tempest.

For over a decade, the church had represented the heart of both the social community and religious parish. Since its construction in 1957, the church had served as a home for destitute individuals and abandoned youth, a site of religious innovation and exploration during official celebrations and informal events, a gathering space for community members and others to discuss issues of local and national importance, a symbol of compassion and liberation, and much more.⁶ From September 1968 to January 1969, Isolotto's church remained the place where those in Isolotto and their supporters gathered to pray, to draw support from each other, and to discuss how to respond to the statements and demands of Florentine ecclesiastical authorities. On multiple occasions, assemblies called to demonstrate solidarity with the community and the ideals it espoused attracted thousands of supporters. In these moments, and many others, the sacredness of Isolotto's church imbued significance to these gatherings and marked the space as a powerful center for the parish and community. In late January 1969, the Florentine religious hierarchy closed the church and locked the faithful outside in the cold.

The events in Florence during this period represented more than just a battle for who had the authority to claim the space of Isolotto's church and define what could happen and who could gather within its walls. This dispute, in actuality, served as a proxy for several larger conflicts in the post-Vatican II years: were the faithful as the People of God or the hierarchy the true representatives of the Church, what was the nature of the priesthood and its relationship to the

⁶ Since 1958, three families had lived in Isolotto's canonical house as the guests of Enzo Mazzi. In November 1968, Mazzi issued rent contracts for the families (EM Documenti 081, "Contratti di locazione per le 3 case famiglia residenti in canonica e dichiarazione dei contratti da parte di Enzo Mazzi parroco," November 10, 1968). Whether or not these families had the right to live in Isolotto's religious building became a contested issue as the conflict with the Florentine Curia escalated throughout 1968 and into 1969.

episcopate, and should the Church primarily be an inward-looking institution dedicated to helping individual Catholics contemplate their religious transgressions or a more social institution devoted to fighting not just religious evils but also social and political injustices. Catholics like those who occupied the Parma Cathedral and those who lived in Isolotto believed the Church should reject its authoritative inclinations and embrace the People of God as its primary identity. They also argued for a more balanced and equal relationship between parish priests and Church officials, particularly bishops. Finally, they wanted the Church to follow the example of Christ and labor against earthly evils such as hunger, poverty, disenfranchisement, and war. Not surprisingly, other Catholics, including many ecclesiastical officials such as Archbishop Florit, viewed such desires and demands as threats to the institutional authority, tradition, and spiritual mission of the Church. During the conflict in 1968 and 1968, many Italians depicted the events in Isolotto as a clash between Florit and Mazzi. While there is no doubt that personal enmity played a role in the decisions made by these two individuals, the stakes were much larger. Indeed, this was actually a clash of two vastly different visions for the post-Vatican II Church.

For the religious community in Isolotto, expulsion from their church in January 1969 marked a crucial point in the difficult journey they had taken for fifteen years. Expulsion also offered the local community the opportunity to fully embrace the emancipatory promise of the Second Vatican Council. During the first eight months of 1969, the faithful of Isolotto would assemble in the church piazza, demonstrating with each meeting that the Church is not merely a church; it is wherever the People of God gather.

2. September and October 1968

On Sunday, September 22, those gathered for the celebration of Mass in the parish churches of Isolotto, Casella, and Vignone received copies of the letter written in support of the Catholics in Parma. Members of the faithful were encouraged to read the letter and sign it if they agreed with its message. Ultimately, 122 people, including the parish priests of Isolotto (Enzo Mazzi and Paolo Caciolli) and Casella (Sergio Gomiti), signed the letter addressed to the “Christian Assembly that occupied the Parma Cathedral.” In addition to sending the letter to the Parma Catholics, the signees also sent copies of the letter to the Bishop of Parma and Pope Paul VI.⁷

In their letter, the Florentine Catholics expressed their full agreement with both the act of occupying the Parma cathedral as well as the motivations behind the gesture. Particularly important was the sentiment expressed by the Parma Catholics throughout their documents when they declared Catholics have to make a clear choice between the poor, which are hailed in the Gospels, and those who worship money and a God that serves to maintain the status quo. The Catholic signees in the three Florentine parishes felt, however, that the “Church did not have a foundation among the poor, the oppressed, the rejected, the hungry, and those hungry and thirsty for justice.” Instead, they believed the leaders of the Church, which included bishops and the pope but also some priests and members of the laity, were “showered with honors, power, prestige, privileges, influential friends, culture, and lastly goods.” The signees did not question the faith or dedication of all members of the hierarchy to help those most in need. Instead, they believed the Church, as an institution, and individual members of the hierarchy, had been corrupted by powerful outside forces. Quoting the Spanish theologian José María González Ruiz, the Catholic signees in Isolotto, Casella, and Vignone declared “the tragedy of [the] Catholic Church in many Western countries [is that] pastors often lose the conscience of their prophetic

⁷ EM Documenti 061, “All’assemblea cristiana che ha occupato il Duomo di Parma,” September 22, 1968. See also *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio”* (Milano: Libreria Feltrinelli, 1969), 15-18.

roles and sleep in the sweet drunkenness of a financial cult run by masters of capital that strangle the Church with golden bonds of magnificent charity.” Thus, for these Florentine Catholics, the important question for all the faithful everywhere was whether the Church was dedicated to the message of social justice within the Gospel or if it was “in service of those who exploit the Gospel to close the mouths of the weak in which lives the spirit of Christ, to deny the poor the good news, to depress discouraged hearts, to suffocate liberty, to block our view, and to increase oppression.”⁸

The authors of the letter also denounced the forceful methods used by the Parma bishop in his handling of the incident in the cathedral and suggested that such heavy-handed tactics are one reason why some Catholics and non-Catholics see the Church as a symbol of oppression instead of one of liberation.⁹ They disagreed with the bishops’ characterization of the event as a non-religious act and wondered how such an official “speaks of the Church that proclaims the Word of God” and “speaks of the Church in which gathers the People of God.” The Florentine Catholics also expressed regret that they could not agree with Pope Paul VI, who had recently accused the Catholics in Parma of lacking love for the Church. The signees concluded their letter by thanking the Parma Catholics for their action, which “created a small opening towards the effective gathering of the People of God.”¹⁰

The following Sunday, those attending Mass in Isolotto received a leaflet titled “Preaching in Our Parish.” The authors of the document, the parish’s priests and a group of laity, expressed their frustration with the current state of preaching within the institutional Church. For this group of Catholics, preaching “had become, in general, official and conventional” and an act limited to “some individual and secondary problems.” However, effectively preaching the

⁸ EM Documenti 061 and *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 15-18.

⁹ EM Documenti 061 and *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 15-18.

¹⁰ EM Documenti 061 and *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 15-18.

Gospel, as Christ had, meant addressing the ills of society and human institutions. The authors believed that “to preach a conventional Gospel disconnected from the real problems of current society served only those who want to keep the people in ignorance and subjection.” The leaflet included five “practical proposals” that sought to transform preaching in the parish, and hopefully by extension the Church, into a communal act focused on not only the Gospel but also “the events of life and actual history.” In relating to the world around them, the authors sought objectivity, not neutrality. To be a part of Christ, they hoped to “be among those that suffer poverty, who are subjected to injustice, oppression, and discrimination.” They stressed devotion to these proposals, even when they brought them into conflict with the “ordinary mentality and the official positions of the hierarchy.” Finally, the authors invited all those who were suffering to take part in the act of preaching. They also encouraged members of the community to contemplate the proposals outlined in the text and to respond with their thoughts and suggestions.¹¹

The next day, September 30, Cardinal Ermenegildo Florit, Archbishop of Florence, sent a letter to Enzo Mazzi, the senior priest in Isolotto. Florit noted that some parishioners in Isolotto had sent him copies of the leaflet distributed in the community’s church on September 22 and told him of the comments made about the Parma occupation during Mazzi’s homily.¹² In regard to the leaflet’s attack on the Church’s close relationship with institutions of power and wealth, Florit reminded Mazzi that he worked and lived in a beautiful church that was constructed with “contributions from the State and with the cooperation of all, not just the wealthy and banks, who wanted to give their time as an offering.” Florit also argued that Mazzi, in advocating the

¹¹ EM Documenti 062, “Parrocchia dell’Isolotto. ‘La predicazione nella nostra parrocchia’,” September 29, 1968. See also EMP 0097, “La predicazione nella nostra chiesa,” September 29, 1968.

¹² It is important to note that throughout the period under study in this dissertation, there continued to be a small number of parishioners and community members in Isolotto who did not agree with the actions undertaken and goals articulated by the parish priests and other lay Catholics.

positions expressed in the leaflet, had assumed a hypocritical stance, since as a parish priest Mazzi “continued to enjoy the advantages (free house, salary, food, immunity, ability to defend your ideas) that the system so harshly condemned assures.”¹³

Shifting his focus from the content to the consequences of the letter sent on September 22, Florit emphasized the gravity of Mazzi’s current predicament. Not only had Mazzi decided to “mercilessly fight the historical and legal structures” of the Church, he had impeded Florit, as bishop, “the right to regulate, as is his function and right, the administration of the sacraments.” According to Florit, Mazzi’s guilt for the latter charge had to do with his defense of the rebellion of Don Paolo Caciolli, Isolotto’s chaplain, who had “heard confessions without proper authority, thus making the sacrament invalid.”¹⁴ With this statement, Florit was reminding Mazzi that according to the ecclesiology of the Church true sacramental authority lies with the bishop and that priests carry out sacraments on behalf and in the name of their bishop. This did not just have implications for the relationship between Florit and the priests in Isolotto. As Florit suggested, by taking improper actions and overstepping their own authority, priests like Caciolli were putting the spiritual well-being of lay Catholics at risk.

Despite all these critiques, Florit expressed a reluctance to make an immediate judgement about Mazzi’s “coherence as a man and priest.” Instead, the archbishop asked Mazzi to reflect on his desires and goals regarding his position within the Church. By the end of October, Mazzi had

¹³ EM Documenti 063, “Lettera di Ermenegildo Florit a Enzo Mazzi con la quale invita a ritrattare alcune sue dichiarazioni o a dimettersi da parroco,” September 30, 1968; see also *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 19-20.

¹⁴ Before arriving in Isolotto in 1965, Caciolli had already suffered a great deal under Florit. While in seminary, Caciolli was one of several students who desired reform of the disciplinary rules and the material under examination. In response to students’ demands for change, Florit removed the seminary’s popular rector and punished the students. After his ordination, Caciolli hoped to be sent to a poor parish where he could serve those most in need. Instead, Florit assigned him to a wealthy community where the priest spent nine months among what he viewed as the indifference of the powerful. In 1965, Florit removed Caciolli from the parish for his failure to collaborate and sent him to Isolotto as a replacement for Don Gomiti. Two years later, after several of his friends were punished for refusing to take the exam to receive normal confessional faculties (any ordained priest in good standing had the faculty to hear the confession of a dying individual), Caciolli boycotted the exam in protest. Even after Florit attempted to pressure him into taking the exam by contacting the priest’s parents, Caciolli declined to take the exam since he viewed it as lacking any real meaning for the life of a priest (*Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 43-48).

to notify Florit of his desire to either “publicly retract an attitude so offensive to the Authority of the Church,” or having decided that he could no longer continue to be part of a structure he deemed to be corrupt, submit his resignation.¹⁵

The letter distributed by Catholics in Isolotto and Casella and sent to Paul VI placed Cardinal Florit in a difficult position and forced him to respond. His full-throated defense of the current order in the Church should not have surprised Catholics in Florence, regardless of their view of the archbishop. Nonetheless, the archbishop’s letter thrust Mazzi into a difficult position. If he refused to comply with the archbishop’s request for a retraction of the views articulated in the letter, he risked dismissal as parish priest. If he submitted to Florit’s demands, Mazzi felt like he would not only be betraying his convictions and his years of toil in the community, but he worried that such action would not prevent the archbishop from taking further disciplinary action against him in the future.

After the initial exchange of letters between the community of Isolotto and Florit at the end of September, the “Isolotto case,” as some would call it, garnered extensive coverage by the national and international press throughout the month of October. Catholics and non-Catholics who hoped to see the post-Vatican II Church fully embrace reform as well as those who opposed such changes observed the unfolding situation with keen interest. Many of the arguments put forth by both the faithful in Isolotto and the Florentine Curia were carried forth by their ideological surrogates. To combat what they perceived as a marked disadvantage in regards to media access and coverage, some in Isolotto began printing and distributing a newsletter. They used this publication to announce their plans, define their goals, and correct what they deemed to be lies and distortions by religious officials and their allies in the press. Throughout the month, community members held informal conversations, strategy meetings, discussions during

¹⁵ EM Documenti 063 and *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 19-20.

religious services, and rallies within Isolotto's church and other parish buildings. By the end of October, neither the Catholics in Isolotto nor Florentine religious officials had lessened their demands or altered their viewpoints regarding the proper direction the Church should take to best serve the People of God. Archbishop Florit's rebuke of the ideas contained in the community of Isolotto's September 22 letter and his demands to Mazzi set the tone early in the month. Yet it was the laity in the working-class community on the periphery of Florence that would end the month with a spectacular display of strength, when thousands gathered inside and outside the parish church in solidarity with the faithful and priests of Isolotto.

After receiving Florit's September 30 letter, Enzo Mazzi shared it with his close friends and colleagues Paolo Caciolli and Sergio Gomiti. The fact the archbishop had only written to Mazzi, even though four priests had signed the open letter, indicated to the group that Florit had decided to finally pursue disciplinary actions against Mazzi after years of conflict. On October 5, Gomiti, the former assistant priest of Isolotto and current parish priest of Casella, sent Florit a letter in which he expressed his support for Mazzi, the community of Isolotto, and their pastoral activity. Gomiti remarked that Florit's letter left him "deeply disturbed" and convinced the archbishop did not have an accurate understanding of the goals and actions of all those in Isolotto, Casella, and elsewhere who were advocating, and living, the "'missionary' pastoral activity" expressed in the Gospels. Gomiti further stressed that he and Mazzi were not isolated examples of confused, radicalized priests. Instead, Mazzi, Gomiti, and many other priests had, as a result of "long years of serious work, deepened and reached a life of communion, of shared responsibility on all levels, of attention, of understanding and mutual obedience." Given this long process of personal and professional maturation, which Gomiti considered "one of the most valuable things of [his] priesthood," he was offended by Florit's characterization of Mazzi and

other priests of a similar ilk as “irresponsible people who spend their time having fun at the expense of others.” As a result of their preaching, their study of the Gospels, and their lived experience of Vatican II, Gomiti believed he, Mazzi, and many other priests were committed to serving the faithful and addressing the “problems of people, above all the poorest, the most humble, and the most abandoned.” Regarding Florit’s accusations that Mazzi enjoyed special luxuries and privileges, Gomiti remarked the archbishop “should know how [his] priests live” and that he should experience this reality for himself instead of listening to the gossip and hearsay of others. Gomiti requested Florit to view the words and actions of priests like Mazzi, Gomiti, and others “with objectivity and without prejudice” since they were “said and done in the sunlight.” Ending his frank letter on an optimistic note, Gomiti expressed hope that such an open study of those who sought to follow the teachings and life of Christ would dispel the “foolishness, gossip, conjectures, manipulation, the illusory obedience that often is only formality.”¹⁶

Three days later, Florit responded to Gomiti with his own letter. The archbishop noted that his original letter to Mazzi was not meant to denounce any efforts to study and implement the teachings of the Gospel, but to “correct, on [his] part, the spirit of certain positions and, on the part [of others], the need to consider the objective limits of a Church” that finds itself in a dynamic earthly realm. That said, Florit repeated his view of how the Church should function, including that it was a priest’s duty to act within the directives outlined by his bishop. As he expressed originally to Mazzi, Florit reiterated that a “priest, on the basis that the Church is hierarchically structured and that his sacred powers come from God and through priestly consecration and the mission conferred on him by the Bishop, is sent to a parish to represent the Bishop.” Florit declared that priests, such as those in Isolotto, stray from, and even abandon,

¹⁶ EM Documenti 064, “Sergio Gomiti al Card. Florit dopo aver letto la lettera a Enzo Mazzi,” October 5, 1968.

their mission when they openly confront positions taken by Church officials, even when they claim to speak on behalf of the People of God. Florit warned Gomiti that he could not allow a priest's personal beliefs "to become the basis of their pastoral work."

Towards the end of his letter, Florit highlighted another "objectively serious" issue, one that he did not expressly communicate to Mazzi in his earlier message: the preaching of class warfare. While Florit acknowledged the pope often spoke about "the rights of the poor and the duties of the ruling classes," he emphasized that Paul VI did not "transform the Christian message in an appeal to class struggle, which cannot but create bitter fruit of hatred, resentment, and eternal anger in the spirits of the listener." The archbishop reiterated his criticism of the sharing among priests of articles written by radical theologians such as José María González Ruiz, who was cited in Isolotto's September 22 letter. Florit reminded Gomiti that the Church hierarchy "did not allow for the reconciling of the Marxist principle of class struggle with evangelical teaching." This line of Florit's argument can be seen as an attempt to push back against the view that the Church should engage directly in the political and social realms, which could endanger its spiritual responsibility. Of course, Catholics like Mazzi, Gomiti, and the faithful of Isolotto and Casella argued that the Church frequently intervened in the terrestrial realm. Instead of fighting for the poor and defenseless, these Catholics believed Church officials were defending the oppressors and wealthy. In the closing to his letter, Florit requested that Gomiti reflect on his position and desires and then share his thoughts.¹⁷

In addition to his letter, Florit sent Gomiti a response to the circular on preaching discussed in Isolotto's church on Sunday, September 29. Although Florit identified the author of the response as only a priest within the diocese, Gomiti and others later learned that Monsignor

¹⁷ EM Documenti 065, "Cardinale Florit risponde a Sergio Gomiti chiedendo anche a lui una risposta nei termini richiesti a Enzo Mazzi," October 8, 1968. See also *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 159-167.

Giuseppe Vignini, who would play a key role in the climatic events in Isolotto a few months later, wrote the text. Vignini agreed with the goal of the circular, the renewal of preaching in the archdiocese, but disagreed with the methods outlined by those in Isolotto. Citing the “arbitrary” nature used to select passages from the Gospel and subsequent “interpretations according to personal criteria,” Vignini argued the discourse on preaching was riddled with “significant blunders.” Vignini also criticized the circular’s attack on modern society as naïve and ultimately useless in addressing the real issues that faced the faithful. According to Vignini, “shouting against the rich, against war, against hunger” was “fashionable” in the present moment. Instead of taking this “easy” approach, priests in the archdiocese should instruct the laity on how “Jesus did not preach in general terms against the injustices of society, but that he called every individual person to penance” for their own faults. If priests truly wanted to change society, they should preach about “reconciliation with God” and emphasize “faith, contrition of the heart, and mercy.” According to Vignini’s view, the priests in Isolotto should not be advocating for a “partisan and protesting preaching” that “reduces the Gospel to the level of social polemics.” After quoting from a recently published editorial titled “Orizzontalismo” in *L’Osservatore Romano*, which criticized the attempt by some to mix theological content with ideological and political agendas, Vignini declared that “the present climate was far too passionate.” Vignini ended his response to the Isolotto circular by warning priests of collaborating too closely and too often with the laity. Such activity could lead priests to confuse the faithful “as the source of inspiration” instead of the actual font of inspiration, “the Word of God codified in the Sacred Scripture and authentically interpreted by the teaching of the Church.”¹⁸

¹⁸ EM Documenti 066, “Risposta critica di mons. Giuseppe Vignini a ‘La predicazione nella nostra parrocchia’ allegato alla lettera di Florit a Sergio Gombi il 8 ottobre 68,” October 1968.

Throughout the autumn of 1968, the faithful of Isolotto, along with Catholics and non-Catholics from neighboring communities, held numerous public assemblies to discuss recent events and plan future actions. Approximately two hundred people, including a few individuals who were opposed to the pastoral approach in Isolotto, attended the first gathering, which was announced during Sunday Mass on October 6 and held three days later in several rooms within the presbytery. After reading and discussing Florit's letter to Mazzi, the majority present decided to circulate the letter to the entire parish so all would know of the serious charges leveled by the archbishop. Those present charged a smaller group with the task of composing a response to Florit's letter that would also be circulated throughout the parish.¹⁹

On October 12 three hundred people gathered at the community's popular school to review the draft of the response to Florit. The lengthy document addressed five key issues. The first point of contention dealt with Florit's decision to address his letter to Mazzi alone when the open letter in support of the Parma occupation was signed by over one hundred people, only four of whom were priests. By taking this approach, Florit demonstrated, according to the authors of the document, that he "considered the other priests and laity to be a flock of sheep (except for a small group of dissenters) that he could engage, influence, and drag around" as he wished. The text also posited that the archbishop's repeated refusals to visit Isolotto might be because he "is afraid of the people." The second issue focused on the unwillingness of Florit to recognize that churches should serve as spaces for discussion and debate among all the People of God, not as buttresses of ecclesiastical power expressed only through the words and actions of bishops and his subordinates. The text cited over a decade of work by, and experiences of, the faithful of Isolotto that had been "confirmed by the Council." Based on this history, the faithful of Isolotto

¹⁹ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 167.

believed “all the members of the People of God have the prophetic spirit of Christ; thus they have the right to speak and express that which God says to them.” Despite this view, the community had adhered to the archbishop’s orders when he prohibited the laity from speaking during services and banned discussions of social encyclicals, including Pope Paul VI’s *Populorum Progressio*. Again, the text extended an invitation for Florit to visit Isolotto to witness firsthand how their actions were not a threat to his authority.²⁰

Building on its discussion of Paul VI’s recent encyclical, the text’s third point addressed the importance for priests and laity to not just preach to the poor and oppressed but to embrace the lessons of the Gospel and create a Church of the Poor. For the faithful in Isolotto, Florit’s ignorance of their reality was manifest when he accused Enzo Mazzi of taking advantage of the financial privileges of being a priest. Since his arrival in the community, Mazzi had sought to lead by example and live a life of poverty and service to all. Indeed, since its construction, the “parsonage had been used in the service of all the People of God and especially those most rejected” by society.²¹ The text used the example of the Church hierarchy banishing Florentine priest Lorenzo Milani to highlight how it ultimately “exploits everything for its own prestige and relieves itself of an authentic walk of dispossession and poverty.” Returning to a common theme, the document’s fourth and fifth points reiterated that the community had invited the archbishop to visit many times. But Florit’s repeated refusals, his tendency to listen only to the negative

²⁰ EM CICL 1/3, “Contributo per un chiarimento a proposito della lettera indirizzata in data 30.9.1968 dal Vescovo di Firenze Ermenegildo Florit al parroco dell’Isolotto Enzo Mazzi,” October 1968. See also *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 21-27. Promulgated on March 26, 1967, *Populorum Progressio* addressed the rights of all peoples, especially those in less-developed regions of the world, to thrive spiritually and economically. Paul VI cited his trips to Latin America and Africa in the early 1960s, as well as “a renewed consciousness of the demands of the Gospel makes it her duty to put herself at the service of all” that derived from the Second Vatican Council.

²¹As Péter Apor, Rebecca Clifford, and Nigel Townson note in their chapter on the importance of faith during 1968 in Europe, “the opening of the presbytery not only broke down divisions between the clergy and lay members of the community, but could also transform community life by providing a space in which radical social experiments could be carried out” (Péter Apor, Rebecca Clifford, and Nigel Townson, “Faith,” in *Europe’s 1968: Voices of Revolt*, eds. Robert Gildea, James Mark, and Anette Warring (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 225).

words of a few malcontents within the parish, and his letter to Mazzi, led the faithful to believe the archbishop viewed the hierarchy as “unquestionable” and the laity as a “collection of individuals without brains and dignity that should solely believe, obey, and blindly serve.”²²

The draft’s conclusion rejected the notion that anyone in Isolotto had anything to publicly retract since they “acted with awareness, sincerity, and objectivity.” In a more direct and forceful attack on the power of the hierarchy and the dominant ecclesiology of the Church, it argued the priests and laity were one body and thus the archbishop could not remove a priest or force him to resign without rejecting all of them. Finally, they declared the intent of the laity to “gradually assume the full responsibility, not delegated from above, of every organizational, social, and administrative part of the church in Isolotto.” This act would not only be a sign of a further maturation of the community’s long-practiced pastoral approach; it would also allow Isolotto’s priests to devote their time to “earn a living by their own hands and to be more available for their prophetic and liturgical work.”²³ Given the tenor of Florit’s response to the community’s September 22 letter, the authors of this new draft must have anticipated that it would provoke a more aggressive action from the archbishop. After a discussion, those present decided to create a new draft of the text, which would be finalized at another gathering later that week. The group also agreed to hold a large assembly for the entire parish in Isolotto’s church on October 31.²⁴

Those in attendance at a meeting on October 17 decided to circulate a one-page flyer that summarized the five main points of the earlier draft. The flyer would also advertise the general assembly to be held in the evening of October 31 as an opportunity to “discuss these arguments, to clarify them, to suggest ideas, and to agree on what to do.” It also encouraged people with

²² EM CICL 1/3 and *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 21-27.

²³ EM CICL 1/3 and *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 21-27.

²⁴ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 167.

more immediate concerns to call the parish church between seven and eight o'clock each evening, when a member of the faithful would be available to talk.²⁵

At the same time that members of the laity in Isolotto were regularly meeting to discuss the relationship between the parish and the archdiocese, another group was participating in a broad-based coalition of religious, literary, and peace organizations to plan and publicize an assembly of solidarity with the people of Czechoslovakia.²⁶ Since the invasion of the country by Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact troops on August 20, a group in Isolotto had been looking for some way to address the plight of those being oppressed and to remind Catholics in Florence of the need to act in light of the teachings of the Gospel.²⁷ During the celebration of the Mass on August 25, Mazzi had offered a brief homily on the invasion. In expressing his solidarity with the people of Czechoslovakia, Mazzi noted his support had nothing to do with politics. Instead, he suggested that if Catholics in Isolotto and throughout the West were to be faithful to the Gospel, they needed to “always be on the side of the weakest, the poorest, and the most oppressed, at the cost of being misunderstood and persecuted.”²⁸ In October, flyers announcing the presence of Milan Opocensky, an evangelical Czechoslovakian pastor and member of the Christian Peace Conference, at an assembly in Isolotto’s church on the nineteenth were distributed throughout Florence. The text on the flyers explained that Opocensky’s presentation would help those present understand how the “capitalist and Christian world” has battled those who see the “authentic construction of socialism as the only concrete hope of liberation from the

²⁵ EM Documenti 071, “Avviso di indizione assemblea per il 31 ottobre. La condanna del Vescovo riguarda solo don Mazzi?” October 17, 1968.

²⁶ Other groups involved in this event included the priests and laity of Casella, Comunità giovanile “S. Michele,” Rivista *Testimonianze*, Gruppo *Libero Impegno*, Gruppo giovanile evangelico, Comitato regionale della Conferenza Cristiana per la Pace, Gruppo Giovanni Battisti, Movimento Internazionale della Riconciliazione, Movimento non violento per la Pace, Clan. FI II, and Movimento partecipazione di base.

²⁷ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 143.

²⁸ EM Documenti 060, “Omelia dove si affronta il tema della Cecoslovacchia invasa dai carrarmati sovietici,” August 25, 1968.

greatest messenger of discrimination, hunger, oppression, and violence: the international imperialism of money.”²⁹

Not surprisingly, these flyers did not go unnoticed by Florentine ecclesiastical officials. A few days before the assembly of solidarity, Mazzi received a two-sentence letter from Giovanni Bianchi, the Vicar general of the archdiocese, who was charged with enforcing the administrative authority of Archbishop Florit. Bianchi noted that he had received a copy of the flyer announcing the assembly and he “absolutely did not approve of such an initiative.”³⁰ In the wake of Florit’s letter to Mazzi, many in Isolotto interpreted Bianchi’s message as another example of the archdiocese’s tendency to aggressively react to those Catholics they perceived to be in error without first seeking clarification regarding motivations. A small group of laity responded to Bianchi’s letter the same day. The lay Catholics declared they “absolutely did not approve” of the Vicar general’s message for three reasons: its “blunt, authoritative style”; the absence of any details as to why Bianchi disapproved of the assembly; and its inability to see the laity as equal partners with Mazzi. Because of these issues, the group found Bianchi’s letter “offensive.” They concluded their letter by expressing the hope that Bianchi, and other members of the hierarchy, would “have the courage” to talk with the laity of Isolotto and not communicate only with those within the hierarchy or their supporters in other parishes.³¹

Despite Bianchi’s notice of disapproval, the assembly of solidarity with the people of Czechoslovakia was held as planned in Isolotto’s church. Near the end of the gathering, members of the laity distributed a letter to those in attendance (copies were also sent to all the families in

²⁹ EM Documenti 068, “Volantino per l’incontro con Milan Opocensky presso la chiesa dell’Isolotto: ‘Testimonianza sugli avvenimenti cecoslovacchi,’” October 15, 1968. For more on this incident, see Chapter Seven of *Isolotto: 1954-1969*.

³⁰ EM Documenti 069, “Lettera di monito del Vicario Generale Giovanni Bianchi a don Mazzi. Disapprova l’iniziativa in programma per il 19 ottobre presso la Chiesa dell’Isolotto,” October 17, 1968.

³¹ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 144-145.

Isolotto). Titled “To all the people of the parish of Isolotto,” the letter began with a quick review of the events in Parma during the previous month and discussed the reasons behind the open letter of solidarity issued on September 22. The letter also summarized the events that had transpired in Isolotto since Mazzi’s receipt of Florit’s letter. Attached to the letter were copies of the flyer drafted on October 17 and the archbishop’s letter.³²

Throughout the month of October, but especially in the week following the assembly of solidarity, the community of Isolotto became a popular and divisive topic of discussion in Florence and throughout Italy. Catholics, both laity and clergy, and non-Catholics expressed their support for Mazzi and the faithful of Isolotto, while other Catholics defended the actions of Florit and the Florentine Curia in letters to newspapers, private letters, and petition drives. This explosion of local and national press coverage, as well as private correspondence, emboldened participants on both sides of this public struggle and further fomented a toxic environment within which the chances of a satisfactory resolution decreased daily.

On October 23, the Florentine Curia issued a release citing the need to respond to the heated discussion surrounding the publication of Florit’s letter to Mazzi. The release argued that Florit’s letter was the “conclusion of a series of requests for the return to and adjustment of a pastoral activity in the parish agreed to and approved by the Bishop.” Florit had addressed the letter to Mazzi and not the entire parish in accordance with the “necessary and legitimate relationships between the Bishop and parish priest.” According to the release, the resolution of the situation would be left to Florit alone. In addition to briefly outlining the motives behind the archbishop’s earlier communication with Mazzi, the Curia’s release also attempted to cast suspicion on the reasons behind the recent activity in Isolotto. Echoing the concerns Florit expressed in his October 8 letter to Sergio Gomiti, in which the archbishop criticized any attempt

³² EM CICL 1/4, “A tutte le persone della Parrocchia dell’Isolotto,” October 19, 1968.

to combine the Marxist idea of class struggle with preaching of the Gospel, the release urged Florentine Catholics to be alert to any “possible manipulation from the outside of any genuine interest for the good of the People of God.” Finally, the release questioned the existence of any sense of solidarity in Isolotto that superseded the parish when it placed quotation marks around *Comunità* in the phrase “‘*Comunità*’ dell’*Isolotto*.”³³

The day after the Florentine Curia issued its release, *La Nazione* published a letter from Luigi Rosadoni, a friend and former colleague of Enzo Mazzi.³⁴ Rosadoni felt that a recent article on the situation in Isolotto had incorrectly characterized his reasons for leaving his former parish, Nave a Rovezzano. In his letter, Rosadoni clarified he did not resign from his position due to pressure from the hierarchy to repudiate his radical pastoral activity, although that pressure did exist. Rather, the decision to resign was a “spontaneous” one that was “the conclusion of a judgement on the situation in the Church.” To support this interpretation, Rosadoni cited his letter to the parish, in which he argued “the Church does not manifest itself as the People of God, but as a center of power that reaffirms in practice its slavery to laws, mechanicity in prayer, confusion between faith and politics, [and] the privileges of the rich.” In his letter to *La Nazione*, Rosadoni thanked Florit for issuing his letter to Mazzi, which so clearly demonstrated the accuracy of his earlier “diagnosis” of the Church. Elaborating on his critique of the Church, Rosadoni declared that “ecclesiastical structures are the ‘tomb of God’.” For Rosadoni, the only way the message of God could be carried forward was “in small and free

³³ “Communiqué of the Florentine Curia” in *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 31.

³⁴ Luigi Rosadoni was born in Sienna, Tuscany on October 6, 1928. After entering the seminary in Florence in 1943, he left to participate in the Resistance during the Second World War. Rosadoni was ordained in 1954. Before becoming the parish priest of Nave a Rovezzano in 1962, he had stints in two other parishes in which he actively denounced the residents’ poor living conditions. Rosadoni always held an interest in the emancipatory possibilities of journalism and wrote for multiple publications throughout his life. Rosadoni is frequently linked with Lorenzo Milani, Ernesto Balducci, Bruno Borghi, and Enzo Mazzi as a key protagonist of the flourishing of Florentine Catholicism from the end of World War II to the late 1960s. Rosadoni died on July 9, 1972. For a good introduction to Rosadoni’s life and work, see B. D’Avanzo, *Essere profeta oggi. Vita, impegno e fede di Luigi Rosadoni della comunità della Resurrezione* (Florence: Didachè, 1982).

communities that translate the Catholic tradition in contemporary terms, which put obedience to God before subjection to men even if they are sacralized, which serve the poor and are not instruments of the rich, who are always ready, to create alliances [*trasformismo*] to exploit everyone and everything.”³⁵ Highlighting the hypocrisy he saw in the current Church and the critics of reformist priests, Rosadoni argued that after Mazzi’s death “the same ones that are now stoning him will exalt him to demonstrate that the Church is always ‘avant-Garde’.” Although Rosadoni offered his full support for Mazzi and the faithful of Isolotto, he encouraged his friend to “let the dead bury the dead” and to look beyond the parish to serve and live the Gospel.³⁶

Shortly after Rosadoni’s letter appeared in *La Nazione*, he participated in an interview with the paper. Rosadoni once again characterized the current Church, given its hierarchical structure and its political and economic power, as an “empty shell.” In response to a question about his vision of the Church, Rosadoni referenced the view of some American Catholics that “the Church is a happening.” Concurring with this assessment, the former parish priest declared “the Church is an imminence; it is no longer a structure.” Rosadoni also pointed to the experience of some Catholics in Holland as a possible path forward towards more spontaneous affiliations, although he reaffirmed the role of the parish as a “function of sociological stabilization.” The interviewer pushed Rosadoni to respond to claims that he and other priests who held similar views were perhaps unknowingly serving as propagandists for the Italian

³⁵ *Trasformismo* is a political concept with a long and powerful history. For many Italians, trasformismo represents all that is wrong with politics. Initially, the concept referred to a pattern of creating flexible and shifting political coalitions based on personal relationships and the desire for deal-making. The hope was that this process would ensure a stable centrist coalition after the unification of Italy in the 1860s and weaken the parties of the extreme right and left. Starting in the late nineteenth century with the election of Giovanni Giolitti as prime minister, the concept shifted to represent a new form where anti-system parties and forces on one side or the other were co-opted by the center. After World War Two, the political system in Italy once again initially adopted an emphasis on maintain a centrist coalition. For many Italians, the system of trasformismo was synonymous with corruption. Given this history, it is not surprising that Rosadoni viewed a similar pattern of deal-making by those in power within the Church as exploitative and evil.

³⁶ *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 33-34 and Alceste Santini, Piero Di Giorgi, and Franco Dall’Ara, eds., *Da Parma all’Isolotto* (Rome: Religione oggi, 1968), 69-70.

Communist Party (the PCI—*Partito Comunista d'Italia*). Rosadoni denounced such a view as farcical and scolded the interviewer for trading in such gossip. Furthermore, Rosadoni argued that “the PCI hierarchy or the Catholic hierarchy seem similar in the game of power.”³⁷ Rosadoni would later write another letter to *La Nazione* seeking to clarify some points in his interview, particularly in regards to the “relationships between ‘progressive priests’ and the PCI.” Rosadoni hoped to clarify, for his “Communist friends,” that he believed there should be, at the grassroots level, ways to create “a collaboration in the battle against every oppressive structure of the dignity of man.”³⁸

During this time, many Catholics and some non-Catholics sent letters supporting the actions in Isolotto to local and national newspapers. On October 24, a letter written by nine different community and religious groups appeared in *La Nazione*. In their letter, the groups supported the work of Isolotto’s priests and faithful, which, they argued, was not done in the spirit of “rebellion” but in the hopes of reforming the Church from within. The groups also remarked they were “struck by the anti-conciliar language” in the Florentine Curia’s comment and wondered if it, when considered with the forceful action taken in Parma by the hierarchy, was not a sign that “the ecclesiastical structures are the force in the Church that is extinguishing the Spirit?”³⁹ The next day, a letter written by nearly twenty former students of Mazzi’s appeared in the press. The youth referred to Mazzi, who had served as their professor of religion at

³⁷ Santini, Di Giorgi, and Dall’Ara, eds., *Da Parma all’Isolotto*, 71-72.

³⁸ Santini, Di Giorgi, and Dall’Ara, eds., *Da Parma all’Isolotto*, 73-74.

³⁹ “Letter to *La Nazione*,” October 24, 1968, in *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 35-36.; “Lettera di solidarietà di alcuni gruppi spontanei inviata al giornale ‘La Nazione,’” Santini, Di Giorgi, and Dall’Ara, eds., *Da Parma all’Isolotto*, 75-76. The letter was signed by the following groups: Gruppo di iniziativa sociale del Cenacolo, Gruppo di ricerca biblica presso A. Niccolini, Gruppo di Libero Impegno di Badia a Ripoli, Gruppo “il Terzolle,” Comunità della Resurrezione, Una comunità di cristiani della Val d’Elsa, Comunità giovanile di Brozzi, Comunità facente capo ad Alberto Parrini, and Un gruppo di cristiani della Parrocchia di Vingone. The group sent a second letter to *La Nazione* after several of their thoughts were misrepresented in the letter published. The Catholics wanted to clarify they viewed the Curia’s language as “anti-conciliar” and not “a serious error on the theological plane” (“Lettera a ‘La Nazione,’” Santini, Di Giorgi, and Dall’Ara, eds., *Da Parma all’Isolotto*, 77-78).

Leonardo da Vinci secondary school, as their “old ‘friend’.” They wanted to show their affection for a man who “never appealed to his authority” as an instructor and who “allowed each one of them to tell their own truth without dividing the world into the good and the evil, the lambs and the wolves.”⁴⁰

Mazzi also received a significant amount of private correspondence from Catholics and non-Catholics expressing either their support for, or criticism of, the ongoing situation in Isolotto. Many of those who wrote Mazzi not only encouraged him and the faithful of Isolotto to continue their work, they also sought to learn more about the steps the community had taken in recent years. Some supporters also sent copies of their letters to Cardinal Florit.⁴¹ One letter of solidarity came from a Catholic in Holland who had read of the events in Florence in *de Volkskrant*, a left-leaning Catholic journal. The writer stated that Catholics in Holland were facing similar issues as those in Isolotto and encouraged Mazzi to “keep doing what you feel like you need to do as a parish priest and as a Christian.”⁴² While the overwhelming majority of people who wrote to Mazzi supported the views articulated and actions taken by him and the community of faithful in Isolotto, some Catholics vehemently disagreed. For example, Don Zeno Saltini, the founder of the Nomadelfia community in Italy, which was founded after World War Two to take care of abandoned and orphaned children, expressed his dismay at the insubordinate position taken against Cardinal Florit.⁴³ Given the Nomadelfia community’s own winding path towards gaining acceptance within the Church, and the community’s principles of direct democracy and communal living, this opposition to the actions taken by the faithful in Isolotto is

⁴⁰ LT 0052, “Gli ex alunni del Liceo Scientifico “Leonardi da Vinci” di Firenze senza destinatario,” October 25, 1968 and Santini, Di Giorgi, and Dall’Ara, eds., *Da Parma all’Isolotto*, 84-85.

⁴¹ LT 0031, “Imbriani e P. Capozzi al cardinal Ermenegildo Florit e p.c. al sac. Enzo Mazzi,” October 23, 1968.

⁴² LT 0038, “P.R. De keüzer a don Mazzi,” October 24, 1968.

⁴³ LT 0051, “Don Zeno a don Enzo Mazzi. Lettera aperta,” October 25, 1968. For other examples of correspondence that criticized Mazzi’s actions and attitudes, see: LT 0043, “Enrico Beni a don Enzo Mazzi,” October 24, 1968 and LT 0060, “Dino Mazzocchi, dott.ing., a don Enzo Mazzi,” October 25, 1968.

striking. While the Catholics in Nomadelfia and those in Isolotto likely shared many similar desires, they differed over how to achieve these dreams.⁴⁴

Mazzi also received a lengthy letter from Monsignor Bruno Panerai, the Urban Vicar of the Archdiocese of Florit. In his letter, Panerai expressed some initial sympathy for the views of those in Isolotto, but later encouraged Mazzi to consider delaying the assembly scheduled for October 31. Panerai also explained how Florit viewed the situation and encouraged Mazzi and the faithful of Isolotto to engage in sincere dialogue with their archbishop.⁴⁵

A major development in the public debate surrounding the events in Isolotto occurred on October 24, when some individuals who had been meeting regularly to discuss Florit's letter and the subsequent press coverage published the community's first newsletter ("*Notiziario*"). Those behind the action had labored throughout the previous night in the canonical house's basement to assemble a rudimentary printing system and to draft material for circulation. At six o'clock in the morning they distributed copies of the newsletter at bus stops throughout Isolotto and at the footbridge crossing the Arno River, locations where thousands of local workers gathered or passed on their way to factories throughout Florence. The newsletter was also posted on a wall in the community to provide easy and communal access to the information.⁴⁶

Throughout the events of late 1968 and early 1969 in Isolotto, many residents viewed the publication of the newsletter as an important step in the community's maturation. In the community's book, *Isolotto 1954-1969*, the newsletter was hailed as "the tool of information, of contestation of journalistic contortions, of organization and of unification, to solicit and express

⁴⁴ For more on the history of Nomadelfia and Don Zeno Saltini, see: Domenico Campana, *Zeno di Nomadelfia: un profeta scomodo* (Milan: Edizioni Paoline, 1991); Antonio Saltini, *Don Zeno, il sovversivo di Dio* (Modena: Il Fiorino, 2003); Fausto Marinetti, *Don Zeno, obbedientissimo ribelle* (Modena: Edizioni Artestampa, 2006).

⁴⁵ EM Documenti 074, "Mons. Panerai Vicario Urbano di Porta Romana a Enzo Mazzi, ai collaboratori, alla comunità parrocchiale," October 24, 1968.

⁴⁶ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 172-173.

the formation of opinion and of collective will.”⁴⁷ After the publication of the first issue of the *Notizario* on October 24, residents in Isolotto would publish additional issues on a regular basis (almost daily during certain intense periods) throughout the autumn and winter of 1968 and well into 1969.⁴⁸

Most of the first newsletter focused on correcting what community members viewed as errors in recent media coverage of the events in Isolotto. Broadly, it stressed that the circular distributed at the October 19 assembly, the previous meetings in the parish buildings, and the publication of the newsletter itself were not the responsibility of only Mazzi and Cacioli, but the entire community of believers in Isolotto. More specifically, the first edition of the newsletter responded to recent articles in four different newspapers (*L'Avvenire d'Italia*, *Il Paese-Sera*, *Il Lavoro*, and *Il Resto del Carlino*) that characterized the actions in Isolotto as the work of a disaffected minority of lay Catholics and their priests, what *Il Resto del Carlino* referred to as “a group of dissenting Catholics,” and as adversarial to Florit and the hierarchy. Instead, the newsletter argued the parish was united in its efforts and the faithful desired to remain within a “Church in which there is room for [them].”⁴⁹

In their effort to combat erroneous and biased media coverage, the creators of the first newsletter sought to establish a streamlined, organized, and appropriate system of information sharing and communal action. Previously, the primary method residents used to share the decisions of their meetings and news of upcoming assemblies was the distribution of letters. Some of those responsible for the newsletter felt that it could serve as an effective outlet for the

⁴⁷ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 173.

⁴⁸ The *notiziari* are divided into three series in the archive of the Comunità dell'Isolotto. The first series, which includes 34 issues, covers October 24, 1968 to May 2, 1969. The second series, during which issues were published monthly, runs from June 18, 1969 to December 1992. Finally, the third series includes bi-monthly publications between 1993 and 2007. Overall, community members published 359 *notiziari* between 1968 and 2007.

⁴⁹ EM Notiziario 0001, October 24, 1968. Excerpted versions of the newsletter can also be found in *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 173-176 and Santini, Di Giorgi, and Dall'Ara, eds., *Da Parma all'Isolotto*, 63-68.

pent up frustration of many residents. Indeed, the previous day, a large number of people had gathered in Isolotto's piazza to discuss several newspaper articles and some present advocated for "a protest demonstration or march" to be held immediately. After some discussion and reflection, the majority ultimately decided that such a response did not correspond to the "principles of fairness and composure that for years had characterized the action of the parish." Born from these desires, the first newsletter advertised the establishment of a coordination center, which would operate from ten o'clock in the morning to midnight in different places throughout the community, as well as nightly meetings to discuss recent events and future strategies. The creators of the newsletter also solicited the help of volunteers on certain streets to distribute future editions to their neighbors as well as individuals to distribute newsletters to residents crossing the footbridge over the Arno every morning. They also encouraged residents to spread copies to their friends and colleagues in factories and schools and to organize assemblies of solidarity and information sharing in these places of work. The first newsletter concluded by encouraging residents to "not let the truth be distorted" by others. To achieve this goal, the authors of the newsletter specified that speaking with the media was "the exclusive work of the Coordination center."⁵⁰

The drafting and publishing of regular newsletters in Isolotto confirmed the greatest fears of Florentines in certain political and religious circles. On October 14, Danilo Bellini, the secretary of the Isolotto section of the Christian Democratic party had sent a letter to the provincial secretary of the party. In his letter, Bellini summarized the gathering on October 9 at which some members of the laity and Isolotto's priests first discussed Florit's letter to Mazzi. In his description of the meeting, Bellini reports that the approximately two hundred men and

⁵⁰ EM Notiziario 0001, October 24, 1968. Subsequent *notiziari* would follow a similar form, with sections devoted to clarifying what community members viewed as inaccurate and biased information in newspapers. In addition, *notiziari* also included announcements of future meetings in Isolotto and beyond the community.

women responded to the reading of Florit's letter "with hoots and shouts threatening the cardinal if he dared to remove Don Mazzi and Don Paolo from their position." Despite this reaction, Bellini depicted a divided meeting, with some arguing the parish priests should "follow the path of the missionary by definitely leaving Isolotto" and another sizable group of people who believed that Mazzi and Caciolli should struggle to remain in the community. Bellini also noted that the community later learned the Florentine Curia had sent an "informer who recorded the entire meeting." Bellini also reported on what he believed to be inappropriate conduct occurring during religious functions in the parish. He noted that during all of the services on Sunday, October 13, the priests shared critical comments about the relationship between the Church hierarchy and government officials and the unwillingness of Church officials to align with the poor and the weak. Finally, Bellini expressed concern that the barracks in the community would "turn into a publishing house that spits out offensive pamphlets."⁵¹

During the last week of October, *l'Osservatore Romano*, the semi-official newspaper of the Holy See, repeatedly published editorials criticizing the events in Isolotto and the attitudes and ideas put forth by the community's priests and laity. The paper's condemnations of the situation in Isolotto, and the community's response to this series of rebukes, highlights the ways in which both supporters and critics attempted to situate their position within accepted historical and religious contexts and norms, particularly the legacy of the Second Vatican Council.

On October 25, the paper commented on the Florentine Curia's statement issued two days earlier, and supported the decision to address the "Florentine case" given the "disproportionate" coverage in the national press, which tended to focus on "ascribing moments of magisterial teaching to closure and involution." The paper argued such sensationalistic practices had the

⁵¹ EM Documenti 070, "Lettera del segretario D. Bellini al segretario provincial della D.C. che ha per oggetto 'dialogo Sacerdoti e popolazione Iaolotto [Isolotto]' sulla lettura pubblica di una lettera inviata dal Card. Florit ai sacerdoti," October 14, 1968.

effect of producing “disorientation and heterodoxy in the People of God.” In such tumultuous times, *l’Osservatore Romano* declared “obedience and humility [were] more than ever the cornerstones of any true religious and ecclesial life.” Yet individual devotion would not fully protect the faithful from the temptation of nefarious outsiders or false prophets. Rather, the paper reminded Catholics that “only the guidance of authority prevents [them] from following false paths.”⁵² On October 27, the newspaper published a lengthy editorial advancing many of the same critiques regarding the “Florentine case.” Penned by R.M. (later identified as Raimondo Manzini, the director of *l’Osservatore Romano*), the editorial once again stressed the problematic coverage of the situation in Isolotto by the Italian press and encouraged the faithful of Isolotto to adhere to the authority of Florit and the ecclesiastical hierarchy in Florence. Manzini also questioned the lay Catholics’ participation in meetings and decisions within Isolotto, characterizing the many “mobilizations of solidarity as childish, and ambiguous.” Closing his editorial, the director of *l’Osservatore Romano* stated the community of faithful did have a role to play in the religious life of Isolotto, “but in the order wished by God and with the virtue that is inspired by Christ, not as the organizers of orchestrated agitation.”⁵³

With this editorial, Manzini echoed Cardinal Florit’s insistence on a hierarchical relationship between a bishop and his priests. By doing so, Manzini was reminding readers that what was at stake in Isolotto was much more than just a disciplinary issue between a bishop and an unruly and insubordinate priest. According to Catholics like Manzini, what Mazzi and the faithful in Isolotto were demanding contradicted the teachings of *De Ecclesia* (also known as *Lumen Gentium*—“The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church”), promulgated by Paul VI in November 1964. This key Vatican II document not only discussed the importance of the People

⁵² GR 95, “Un comunicato della Curia di Firenze sui casi della parrocchia dell’Isolotto,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, October 25, 1968, p. 7. See also *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 31-32.

⁵³ GR 100, “Il ‘caso’ di Firenze,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, October 27, 1968, p. 2.

of God, it underlined the supreme authority of the episcopal college, with the pope as its head. As part of the discussion of the structure of the Church and the episcopate, the document affirms that a bishop's authority is given by God, not the pope.⁵⁴

The next day, the community of Isolotto publicly responded to *l'Osservatore Romano's* most recent editorial, what they deemed the "most severe and merciless" critique published since September 22. In their rejoinder, the authors invited Manzini to visit Isolotto so he could speak with women, workers, and the faithful to understand their hardships, motivations, and desires to live according to the Gospel. If he were to visit Isolotto, Manzini would see that the people are not "organizers of agitation but are mobilizing to defend their honorability" and to inform themselves, much like they did when the workers of Galileo and FIVRE were dismissed and after the flood of 1966. Finally, the authors of the letter suggested that if Manzini were really interested in "'defending' the doctrine and the discipline of the 'People of God', he should listen to them" and not use a "complicated language purposefully designed to strike the poor and silence the Gospel that speaks frankly."⁵⁵

On October 30, *l'Osservatore Romano* published another editorial penned by Raimondo Manzini. In this latest commentary, Manzini attempted to once again label the views of those in Isolotto as antithetical to the documents and experience of Vatican II. He argued that "when one considers the Conciliar documents, they cannot find support for transferring pastoral authority or jurisdictional power to the community of the faithful." Indeed, Manzini pointed to several passages in *De Ecclesia* (The Constitution of the Church) that stressed how the faithful should

⁵⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

⁵⁵ GR 122, "I parrochiani dell'Isolotto polemici con *l'Osservatore*," *Il Messaggero*, October 29, 1968. The response can also be found in *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 41-42 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969,* 189-91.

respect the authority of their Bishop. Manzini concluded his editorial by encouraging his “friends in Isolotto” to engage in some “communal and brotherly reflection.”⁵⁶

In the midst of the media uproar surrounding the events in Isolotto, Enzo Mazzi returned to the community from Roccamena, Sicily on October 25. For the previous five days, the priest and a group of laity had been helping those affected by a significant earthquake on the island. Members of the community would continue to volunteer in Sicily for eight months, during which time they were financially supported by the entire population of Isolotto. In the 1969 publication *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, some described this service as another visible sign of the community’s maturation, which reflected “its capacity to actively be interested in the problems of other communities.”⁵⁷ The day after Mazzi’s return, more than five thousand people gathered in Isolotto to express their solidarity with the priest and the community.⁵⁸ While this was by far the largest crowd to ever assemble in Isolotto, it would quickly be surpassed five days later when over ten thousand people attended a general meeting in the community’s church and piazza.

The assembly on October 31 was unlike any other event that had happened in the brief history of Isolotto, and perhaps the much longer history of the Catholic Church in Florence. It represented the highpoint of the experiment Mazzi had begun with his first homily in December 1954. The assembly, like the one held in solidarity with the dismissed workers of Galileo in 1959, also reinforced the space of Isolotto’s church as the center of the social and religious community. The overflowing crowd of Catholics and non-Catholics in Isolotto’s church that night more closely resembled what the group of young Catholics in Parma had hoped to accomplish when they temporarily occupied the city’s cathedral in August.

⁵⁶ GR 124, “Polemica ‘impietosa’?,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, October 30, 1968, p.2. This editorial can also be found in *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 43-45 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 195-197.

⁵⁷ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 127-129.

⁵⁸ *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 11.

The assembly began with a brief introductory speech by Enzo Mazzi. Mazzi situated that evening's gathering, and the events of September and October, within the history of community, noting it was "a very important step in a long journey that began fourteen years ago and that has moved forward with mutual trust that is still growing." For Mazzi, this long communal effort to help those abandoned and overlooked by society had forged a "brotherhood of acts, not words." For many Catholics in Isolotto and elsewhere, differences that had traditionally divided the faithful within the Church, and separated the institution from others throughout the world, held no importance. Mazzi viewed the assembly in Isolotto's church as "confirmation of [the people's] unity of intent, of work, of responsibility." According to Mazzi, those who had criticized his words and actions, as well as the recent events in Isolotto, failed to understand the true purpose of this communal attitude. The faithful of Isolotto and in like-minded communities throughout the Catholic world "did not want to impose anything on anybody" or "substitute themselves for authority." To help those in the Church hierarchy, especially Florit, understand the purpose of the assembly, Mazzi encouraged everyone present to speak and share their thoughts and "give proof to [their] new maturity." Mazzi concluded his brief remarks on a positive note, describing this new stage in the history of the community and the Church:

It is a thing that is a bit new for our times, but it is a beautiful thing, that the people, which never counted for anything, the people that have always only paid and bowed their heads, have been called to express themselves and to count for something, and this in the name of the Gospel, the Council, and in the name of one of the most authentic lines of human experience of our times.⁵⁹

After Mazzi's introductory statement, he read a letter ninety-three Florentine priests had sent to both him and Florit. In their letter, the priests expressed solidarity with Mazzi in what they described as "a decisive moment of his pastoral experience and in the life of his

⁵⁹ EM Documenti 077, "Parrocchia dell'Isolotto-Verbale conclusive dell'assemblea tenutasi il 31 ottobre 1968," October 31, 1968. See also *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 46-47.

community.” The priests also declared their support for an active laity in the Church. Citing the emphasis on helping the poor and weak in *Christus Dominus*, the Second Vatican Council’s Decree on the Pastoral Office of the Bishops, the priests credited Mazzi with inspiring them to “rethink with the most rigorous seriousness the way in which we live our pastoral responsibility within the heart of our communities.”⁶⁰ Among the signees of the letter were many priests who lived with and served the poorest and most disadvantaged of Florence, including war orphans and factory workers. In addition, the future Cardinal Archbishop of Florence, Silvano Piovanelli, who was ordained by Cardinal Elia Dalla Costa in 1947 and who had served in the industrial community of Rifredi, was among the signees.

The assembly in Isolotto’s church began after nine o’clock that evening and lasted until the early hours of the next morning due to the overwhelming number of individuals from Isolotto and other communities who wanted to speak, often on behalf of their families and entire neighborhoods.⁶¹ Every person who rose to speak in Isolotto’s church expressed their solidarity with Enzo Mazzi, Paolo Cacioli, and Sergio Gomiti. Bruna Mancini, speaking on behalf of 105 families of via Palazzo dei Diavoli, declared her happiness that Mazzi had shared Florit’s letter with the parish because they were a family who shared responsibility for the September 22 letter to the Catholic group in Parma. If Florit removed Isolotto’s priests, Mancini argued the Catholics of Isolotto should “resign from the parish.”⁶² Mauro Sbordoni, a teacher at the local elementary school, pronounced that “Don Mazzi chose the people of Isolotto and the people of Isolotto chose Don Mazzi.” Because of this close bond, Sbordoni believed that Mazzi should remain in

⁶⁰ EM Documenti 075, “Lettera a Enzo Mazzi da parte di 93 sacerdoti diocesani. Mostrano la loro riconoscenza e partecipazione,” October 31, 1968. See also *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 48-9 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 198-199.

⁶¹ Rules for the assembly can be found in Santini, Di Giorgi, and Dall’Ara, eds., *Da Parma all’Isolotto*, 111.

⁶² EM Documenti 077 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 202-203.

the community and “not be sent here and there like a puppet.”⁶³ Speaking briefly, Gino Mazzanti discussed how, after meeting with Mazzi several times over the years, he felt like the priest was “a brother.”⁶⁴ Near the end of the assembly, Florindo Biondo addressed Mazzi and beseeched him to “stay calm” since he “would not only have the goodwill of the population of Isolotto, but from all those throughout Italy and also outside of Italy.”⁶⁵

In their declarations of support for Mazzi, Caciolli, and Gomiti, individuals also spoke positively about how the social and pastoral practices enacted by the priests had made Isolotto a special community. In so doing, they frequently linked this activity to the teachings of the Gospel, the actions of Christ, the documents and spirit of the Second Vatican Council, and the activities of other Florentine priests. During his comments, Maurizio Sisani noted that while “means of enticement” such as the parish cinema and recreation clubs were important for community bonding during Isolotto’s early years, what was most critical in the present was “a continuous search for greater consistency with the Gospel, a greater research of poverty, of love towards one’s neighbor, of charity.”⁶⁶ In a similar vein, Franco Bedini, speaking on behalf of a group of middle-school students, argued that Mazzi, in speaking and preaching about “poverty, simplicity, and community, has followed the path created by the first master, Christ, putting into practice his example.”⁶⁷ Sergio Rusic believed the massive turnout at the assembly was due in large part to Mazzi’s early efforts to “initiate contact with citizens in a climate of equality and brotherhood towards all, wanting to deliberately ignore the personal history and ideas of everyone.” In addition, the later decisions by Mazzi and Sergio Gomiti to require moderate dress for all kids in church, to reject payments for weddings and other services, and their use of a

⁶³ EM Documenti 077 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 220.

⁶⁴ EM Documenti 077 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 211.

⁶⁵ EM Documenti 077 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 219-220.

⁶⁶ EM Documenti 077 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 202.

⁶⁷ EM Documenti 077 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 211-212.

different and new “language from the altar of the church” meant that both “believers and non-believers [could] enter the church.”⁶⁸ Echoing Rusic’s viewpoint, Virginia Tei, speaking on behalf of the families of piazza dei Tigli, declared that she and others in Isolotto did not “want the church to become a shop where the priest exploits the living and the dead, but a refuge of redemption, love, [and] Christian charity for every human being.”⁶⁹ Gioia Lenzi, who studied at a popular school in Isolotto after work, thanked Mazzi for his desire to reach out and understand her and other workers’ struggles and needs. While she acknowledged that another Florentine priest who faced repercussions from the hierarchy, Lorenzo Milani, aided students “to accomplish [their] work,” it was “only in Isolotto [that] we have realized the school.”⁷⁰

Many of the speakers expressed a desire for Florit to visit Isolotto and listen to the faithful about their communal experiences and desires for a more active Church. Some individuals, like Clara Pistolesi, who spoke on behalf of the families of via del Roseto, found it hard to believe the archbishop would force the people of Isolotto to “disown a [pastoral] line [they] felt was so close to the Council, *Pacem in Terris*, *Populorum Progressio* and all that they share[d].”⁷¹ Others, such as Carla Fabiani, who represented the approximately 160 families of viale dei Pini, went further, demanding that as lay Catholics it was their “right and duty to have the Bishop hear [their] voice” since the development of Isolotto had been a communal process.⁷² Some speakers, however, articulated a much more negative view of the hierarchical structure of the Church, one that demanded obedience and silence instead of fellowship and joy. They also had harsh words for the most vocal critics of Mazzi. Franco Bedini, commenting on behalf of a group of middle-school students, described the Church as “saturated in the dust of traditions, of

⁶⁸ EM Documenti 077 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 207-209.

⁶⁹ EM Documenti 077 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 217.

⁷⁰ EM Documenti 077 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 210.

⁷¹ EM Documenti 077 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 201-202.

⁷² EM Documenti 077 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 212-213.

the most despotic authority interested in concerns other than the spiritual and pastoral ones that Christ had addressed.”⁷³ Alberto Brunetti, a member of the parish of Casella, characterized the Catholics who had publicly and anonymously targeted Mazzi as “unspeakable people, looking out for [their own] personal interests” regardless of what damage they did to the Church.⁷⁴ And finally, Mauro Sbordonni expressed concern about a potential private meeting between Mazzi and Florit. Sbordonni felt the press coverage of such a meeting would only serve to erase the people of Isolotto from the conversation and make it easier for the hierarchy to “tear [priests] from their people... and silence” them.⁷⁵

More than one individual who spoke during the assembly recognized the significance of the event and how it represented a new and important stage of the community’s short history. Daniele Protti expressed some emotion at seeing a “church finally full, where the people can speak.” In Protti’s previous parish, “it was the priest that spoke and the others stayed quiet,” a situation that reminded him of his military service. In the assembly, however, everyone could speak, even “those so-called opponents have freedom of speech.”⁷⁶ Following Protti, Sergio Montanari related a recent incident outside Florence’s cathedral when he overheard part of a conversation between two priests about the events in Isolotto. When Montanari attempted to interject, the priests admonished him, declaring “this is not the place to speak of it” and that the ancient and magnificent cathedral was their “house.”⁷⁷ Franco Quercioli, addressing Florit’s claims regarding the funding of Isolotto’s church, argued “the church is not only for the Archbishop, not only for the priests: the church is ours, because many of us, at the time, poured money into it, paid for it. For this the church and the canonical house were put at the service of

⁷³ EM Documenti 077 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 212.

⁷⁴ EM Documenti 077 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 201.

⁷⁵ EM Documenti 077 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 220-221.

⁷⁶ EM Documenti 077 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 217-218.

⁷⁷ EM Documenti 077 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 219.

all the people.” Looking back at the community’s history, Quercioli cited the 1959 assembly held in the church to express solidarity for dismissed factory workers as a pivotal moment when “the church began to be for all the people of Isolotto.” Quercioli concluded his commentary by urging all those present to continue to “transform the life of the parish in a way that we lay people can become even more involved in all that is done, in all the decisions.” Not only would this further create an integrated community, it would liberate Mazzi and Caciolli from “the burdens of the parish organization that weights heavy on their shoulders” and their “exhausting, daily, [and] draining” work.⁷⁸

After this lengthy period of emotional testimony, the president and secretary of the assembly drafted a summary of the discussion meant to be circulated throughout Isolotto and other communities in Florence. Signed by Isolotto’s two priests, Mazzi and Paolo Caciolli, as well as five lay Catholics on behalf of the entire assembly, the document served as the community’s response to the letter Florit sent to Mazzi on September 30. A main focus of the document had to do with Florit’s refusal to recognize the familial, equal relationship that existed among Isolotto’s priests and laity that had been forged through fifteen years of experience. As the People of God, this community of believers included both priests and laity, as well as bishops and other members of the Church hierarchy. Given this situation, the people of Isolotto refused to accept the notion that their priests should submit their resignations for the ideas expressed in the letter of solidarity with the Catholics in Parma, since those ideas reflected the judgement of all in the community. Furthermore, they believed it to be their “right and duty to make known their determined opposition towards any retraction of the pastoral approach, ideas, testimony of life, and gestures of [their] priests.” Acknowledging Florit’s previous accusations regarding the disobedience of Isolotto’s priests, the community of believers declared that any such refusal to

⁷⁸ EM Documenti 077 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 216-217.

comply had only to do with “exterior matters” and that the priests had always “fully obeyed the Gospel.” The community of Isolotto turned this charge back on Florit, claiming they had attempted to follow “the directives of a Hierarchy and a Bishop” that unfortunately refused to “participate in the life and in the conditions of people, to understand the authentic needs of ordinary people, that is located on a very high and distant pedestal, that many times has proved contrary to [their] human dignity and Christian conscience.” Continued attempts by ecclesiastical officials to interrupt the activities of the community threatened “to suffocate the only possibility to breathe within the Church” for many of the faithful. Despite the efforts of some in the hierarchy and some individual residents who were opposed to the direction in Isolotto, the community of believers planned to continue their journey and process of maturation. To that end, lay Catholics would take on greater roles in the life of the parish, which would allow Isolotto’s priests to “deepen their testimony of priestly life and to become men among men.” The document concluded by inviting Florit to visit the community to engage with the faithful in open and sincere dialogue.⁷⁹

The assembly in Isolotto’s church began in October and ended in November. The conflict between the Catholics in Isolotto and the religious hierarchy in Florence had nominally started as a disagreement over the events that took place in Parma in late September. However, with the assembly on October 31, and the actions taken in advance of the massive display of solidarity, there was little doubt this dispute had more to do with the ideas and innovations that had been explored in Isolotto for over a decade and the reluctance of Florit and other ecclesiastical officials to allow such behavior to continue. By the beginning of November, the ideological and religious positions of the parties locked in struggle had not shifted. With the stakes high, it

⁷⁹ EM Documenti 076, “Verbale dell’assemblea del 31 ottobre ’68,” October 31, 1968 and EM CICL 5, “Introduzione e verbale conclusivo dell’assemblea tenutasi il 31 ottobre,” November 6, 1968. See also *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 50-52.

remained to be seen how Florit would interpret and respond to the community of Isolotto's latest assembly.

3. November 1968

The ecclesiastical hierarchy in Florence did not delay in attempting to assert its authority after the assembly in Isolotto at the end of October. On November 2, the Curia released a brief statement in which they charged the "difficult situation" and recent events in Isolotto had led to "repercussions for the ecclesiastical unity of the diocese." The communique declared that responsibility for resolving the situation remained with Florit, who would be assisted by "the regular institutions for pastoral government of the diocese." The archbishop and his advisors would seek out "a solution in accordance with the true nature of the local Church and the common good of its faithful."⁸⁰ The hierarchy's quick and brief response demonstrated its refusal to be swayed by the frequent and powerful displays of solidarity with Enzo Mazzi and the faithful of Isolotto. Throughout the month of November, the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the faithful in Isolotto remained steadfast in their positions, even while some in the Church sought to encourage both Florit and Mazzi to work together to resolve the situation. Any possibility of a satisfactory resolution vanished, however, when at the end of the month the community published their own catechism, *Incontro a Cristo*, without the approval of the Florentine Curia. In response, ecclesiastical officials in Florence decided that patience and calls for reflection and repentance would no longer be suitable. Instead, they responded to this dramatic action quickly and forcefully. Both the publication of the catechism and the reaction by the Florentine Curia served to further escalate the conflict and increase the odds of a permanent fracturing of the Catholic community in Florence and Italy.

⁸⁰ "Comunicato alla Curia Arcivescovile" in *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 55.

After the Florentine Curia's statement on November 2, individual Catholics and local groups continued to publically and privately express their support for the actions and views of both the hierarchy and the faithful in Isolotto.⁸¹ Early in the month, a group of Florentine Catholics published a signed circular in which they demonstrated their solidarity with Archbishop Florit and decried how some were creating confusion in the Church through the adoption and articulation of misguided beliefs.⁸² On November 3, a group of parishioners from Casella sent Florit a letter in which they responded to his comments addressed to Sergio Gomiti the previous month. They described the challenging living conditions of their poor community and argued that a district like theirs "offered to the Church the concrete possibility of truly being what the Council affirmed in *Gaudium et Spes*." Witnessing the poverty of much of the world, the faithful in Casella "accepted for their church a barracks first of wood and then sheet metal." Like the Catholics in Parma and Isolotto, the group from Casella desired for the Church to separate itself from its financial and political allies who were responsible for much of the oppression in the world. As the faithful in Isolotto had done on many occasions, the Catholics in Casella invited Florit to visit their community and witness firsthand how they were attempting to resolve the problems of their daily reality.⁸³

The situation in Isolotto remained a popular topic in the press throughout the month of November. Some publications, such as *ABC*, a weekly political and satirical tabloid based in

⁸¹ There are over one hundred letters in the Isolotto community archive that were sent in the month of November (LT 0125-0228). Most of the authors of these letters express solidarity with Mazzi and the faithful in Isolotto, although a few individuals state disagreement with the positions taken by the religious community (for example, see LT 0193, "Mario Ienna ai 'Signora: Giancarlo Zani, Gabriella Bellucci e Lia Romanelli," November 11, 1968).

⁸² EM Documenti 078, "Gruppo di cattolici fiorentini invitano a firme di solidarietà all'Arcivescovo rattristati dagli 'erranti' dell momento," November 1968.

⁸³ EM Documenti 079, "Lettera al Card. Florit della Comunità parrocchiale della Casella. Risposta alla lettera di Florit a Sergio Gomiti," November 3, 1968. The letter is also reproduced in Santini, Di Giorgi, and Dall'Ara, eds., *Da Parma all'Isolotto*, 119-122 and Il Regno, *L'Isolotto Documenti. La crisi della chiesa locale di Firenze* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1969), 75-77. Sergio Gomiti and three parishioners signed the letter on behalf of the community.

Milan, chose to portray the events as a battle between two men, Mazzi and Florit.⁸⁴ Other outlets that held close ties to the Church or occupied positions on the right of the political spectrum frequently depicted the events in Isolotto in a more sinister fashion. Alfonso Ughi of *Il Secolo d'Italia*, the daily newspaper of the neo-fascist *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI), condemned Enzo Mazzi as a heretic who espoused Marxist beliefs and argued the Catholics in Isolotto distorted the writings and beliefs of others.⁸⁵ Publications that sympathized with the cause of those in Isolotto portrayed the situation in the community in a more positive light and defended the actions of Mazzi and the laity as being true to the spirit of the Gospels and the experience of the Second Vatican Council.⁸⁶ Because of these diverse accounts in the media, some in the community began to circulate a document to supporters in an effort to refute distortions of the community's statements by ecclesiastical officials and their allies in the press. The text included Mazzi's introduction to the October 31 assembly, the conclusions drawn from that event, and a few other expressions of solidarity by groups of Catholics and non-Catholics.⁸⁷

Although the Florentine Curia issued a statement in response to the assembly in Isolotto's church on November 2, Florit did not personally respond to the community's declaration until November 14. This delay was due in large part to the archbishop's participation in a journey to Brazil. Although Florit returned to Italy on November 7, he spent two days in Rome before travelling to Florence.⁸⁸ Prior to his arrival, Auxiliary Bishop Bianchi had written to Mazzi, letting the priest know he was still waiting to receive the "specific and accountable written

⁸⁴ GR 160, "Un parroco contro il cardinale," *ABC*, November 8, 1968, 32-34.

⁸⁵ GR 142, "Don Mazzi si erige ad antipapa con la 'benedizione' dei marxisti," *Il Secolo d'Italia*, November 2, 1968, 2 and GR 153, "I compagni di don Mazzi falsano sfrontatamente le lettere dei 93 sacerdoti," *Il Secolo d'Italia*, November 6, 1968, 2.

⁸⁶ GR 149/5, "Non degli eretici scismatici ma dei cattolici fedeli al vangelo," *Nuovi tempi*, November 3, 1968, 1-3.

⁸⁷ EM CICL 5, "Introduzione e verbale conclusive dell'Assemblea tenutasi il 31 ottobre," November 6, 1968.

⁸⁸ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 231.

response” Florit had requested in his letter dated September 30. Bianchi noted that Florit would read Mazzi’s statement upon his return to Florence.⁸⁹

On November 14, Florit convened a body of external vicars to read his response to the events in Isolotto.⁹⁰ Florit began by arguing that a bishop’s difficulty duty is to guide the salvation of others and that he is responsible to and for all who live within a diocese. Citing Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium* (“The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church”), Florit maintained that “a Catholic assembly cannot exist if it is detached from, or much less if it is opposed to him.” Although he stressed that priests and their bishop are part of a brotherhood, Florit declared priests must recognize the bishop as their father whom they must “respectfully obey.” Responding to the demands put forth by the faithful in Isolotto, the archbishop stated communities who make ecclesiastical decisions “subvert the authority of the teaching of the Church.” In regards to the repeated requests for Florit to visit with the faithful in Isolotto, the archbishop refused the invitation, declaring such acts “obstruct the good order of the ecclesiastical community, restrict true dialogue, and renounces the meaning of the episcopal office.” Echoing the Curia’s statement earlier in the month, Florit claimed the recent activities in Isolotto, especially the behavior and motivations of the parish priest, could poison the healthy relationship between the priests of the diocese and himself if not promptly settled. Despite these accusations, Florit nonetheless assured those in attendance he wanted to give Isolotto’s priest another opportunity to reconsider his attitude and actions.⁹¹ Throughout his relatively brief

⁸⁹ EM Documenti 080, “Il Vescovo Ausiliare sollecita la risposta di Enzo Mazzi a Florit ‘precisa e responsabile’,” November 4, 1968.

⁹⁰ A vicar oversees an ecclesiastical missionary territory that is located near a diocese and is overseen by a titular bishop. In *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, those from Isolotto impugned the properness of this body by claiming the vicars present on November 14th were “elected” within the span of a day. They also argued that Florit did not consider recent expressions of support for the faithful in Isolotto by lay Catholics and priests throughout the diocese (*Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 231).

⁹¹ EM Documenti 083, “Notificazione del Card. Florit inviata a Enzo Mazzi,” November 14, 1968. See also *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 60-63; *L’Isolotto Documenti*, 84-88; and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 231-236.

statement, Florit situated his defense of his own authority within the documents of the Second Vatican Council, citing *Lumen Gentium* eleven times and *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (“The Decree on the Life and Ministry of Priests”) four times.⁹² Furthermore, in what might have been an attempt to diminish Mazzi’s standing and authority, Florit did not once refer to the priest by name throughout his statement.

As he had done so many times before, Mazzi responded to Florit’s statement within the confines of Isolotto’s church. The next Sunday, Mazzi read a statement as part of his homily during the celebration of Mass. He began by stating that the past month had been a time of “intense community life that had offered to all of them [in Isolotto] the possibility to mature” and to articulate some thoughts. Mazzi stressed that all of their actions, including the assemblies and the publication of texts, were guided by their desire to “live in a search for authentic obedience” toward the bishop and others in the hierarchy. Once again, Mazzi took the opportunity to extend an invitation to Florit to visit the community for a “true conversation with the people, frank and brotherly” instead of only meeting with them in a formal setting. The priest defended the October 31 assembly in the parish church as a “true pastoral council” created to share with the bishop the “aspirations of the people.” In regards to the many incidents in the past that Florit saw as prior examples of disobedience (modifying the liturgy and omitting some genuflections and crossing, the laity speaking in church, commenting during services on various social encyclicals, allowing Paolo Caciolli to hear confessions despite not being approved to do so), Mazzi declared they had tried to talk with Florit about each of these issues, but were never received by the archbishop.

⁹² Paul VI promulgated *Lumen Gentium*, one of the most important documents to come out of Vatican II, on November 21, 1964. Chapter Two of the Dogmatic Constitution is devoted to discussing the People of God, while subsequent chapters focus on the structure of the church and the role of the laity. *Presbyterorum Ordinis* was promulgated on December 7, 1965. It is the result of discussion during the second, third, and fourth sessions of the Council and a desire for the existence of a separate document focused on the priesthood, instead of including that topic within *Lumen Gentium*.

Finally, Mazzi concluded his response by stating the community would continue with their “pastoral line as they had done so up until now, in communion with the bishop and with the entirety of the diocese.”⁹³

Beyond the public exclamations of support in the press and the private letters written to both Florit and Mazzi, some Catholics sought to encourage both parties to find a quick and positive resolution to the ongoing dispute. On November 6, over one hundred Florentine priests sent to Cardinal Florit a letter in which they summarized the discussion they had during a meeting in Isolotto in late October. The priests claimed they had sent Mazzi a private letter that had been signed by some but not all of them as a gesture of “a brotherly and friendly hand”.

Unfortunately, this private letter had been made public. Thus, the body of priests was writing to Florit to give him their “analysis of the pastoral situation” in the diocese. They claimed that the “Mazzi case is important in that it is a sign of a situation of distress that is embedded deep in the universal Church [and] also the Florentine Church.” Based on their reflection, the priests wanted to highlight six themes for Florit to consider. They believed that Vatican II “had made each member of the Church jointly-responsible for the fate and activities of the Church.” Faced with what they believed to be a “truly new situation in the practice and self-understanding of the Church,” the priests, citing *Gaudium et Spes*, argued for dialogue between all parties involved. For this dialogue to be effective in creating a “true communion” of believers, the voice of the laity needed to be a “necessary component, although certainly not definitive, of every pastoral choice.” Through dialogue, Catholics in Florence could create an “appropriate ecclesial social

⁹³ EM Documenti 084, “Analisi svolta sulla ‘notificazione del Vescovo’,” November 17, 1968. See also “Risposta di don Mazzi alla notificazione” in *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 64-67 and *L’Isolotto Documenti,* 89-91. Three days later, on November 20, a more “official” community response to Florit’s letter was published. The document was signed by Mazzi, Gomiti, and Caciolli, and eight parishioners of Isolotto and Casella and read in Isolotto’s church on November 24 (EM Documenti 086, “Lettera dell’Isolotto e della Casella alla notificazione del Card. Florit del 14 novembre 1968. Risposte ufficiali. Allegato brogliaccio,” November 20, 1968. See also “Risposta alla notificazione arcivescovile” in *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 68-73 and *L’Isolotto Documenti,* 93-97)

structure,” one that the diocese currently lacked. For the priests, while everyone had a role to play in this act of innovation, the heaviest burden lay with the archbishop and his advisors, as only their “deep certainty could produce the desired results.” According to the priests who sent the letter to Florit, an example of this ideal social structure within the Church already existed. The lived experience of the Second Vatican Council represented a model where every participant “could have a free voice” and no one party possessed all the advantages. In their conclusion, the priests hoped Florit would convene a church council to discuss the situation in Isolotto and the other challenges facing the diocese.⁹⁴

The same day the group of Florentine priests sent their letter to Florit, the diocesan board of Florence’s Catholic Action issued a document summarizing their stance on the recent events in Isolotto. In their statement, the board cited Vatican II’s *Lumen Gentium* several times. The board attempted to articulate a position that supported the claims and actions of both Florit and the Catholics in Isolotto. They declared that “the unity of the People of God has no sense of uniformity and requires particular care for the pluralism of experiences.” Yet, the board stressed the Church retains a hierarchical institution and that the Council, via *Lumen Gentium*, reinforced this structure of authority as a means to benefit all the faithful. The board hoped they could serve all in the Church if needed during this “delicate juncture.”⁹⁵

After Florit’s mid-November notification, and Mazzi’s public response, six of the priests who had sent Mazzi a letter of solidarity a month earlier sent another letter to their colleague in Isolotto. In their second letter, the priests asked Mazzi to clarify some of his positions in an effort to find a resolution with Cardinal Florit. Specifically, they made four suggestions: that Mazzi

⁹⁴ *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 56-59 and *L’Isolotto Documenti*, 79-81. After Florit’s notification on November 14, the priests’ letter was published in the press on November 22nd (GR 181, “La lettera dei parroci al cardinal,” *La Nazione*, November 22, 1968).

⁹⁵ *L’Isolotto Documenti*, 83-84. The six priests that signed the letter were Mino Tagliaferri, Danilo Franceschi, Averardo Dini, Giorgio Bianchi, Angelo Chiaroni, and Corso Guicciarini.

focus his attention on a specific section of Florit's notification, that Mazzi "reaffirm the validity of some doctrinal principles" outlined by Florit that would not impact the "pastoral line" taken by the community in Isolotto, that Mazzi assure Florit he recognized the archbishop's authority, and that Mazzi and some laity from Isolotto seek out the opportunity to meet with Florit.⁹⁶

Mazzi did not heed the advice of his fellow priests. Instead, on November 27, the community of Isolotto published *Incontro a Cristo*, a catechism designed to help children prepare for their first communion around the age of ten. The document actually consisted of two separate texts. The first, written for children, was composed of nineteen different sections, each with four pages that included a picture of a theme, a description of the theme to be covered, and the readings and work to be completed before the assigned meeting. The second text, nearly ninety pages in length, was designed as a manual for those who were tasked with teaching children about Christ over twenty-five meetings. According to those in Isolotto behind the catechism, *Incontro a Cristo* represented "the outcome of the lived experience of our parish community; the outcome of over ten years of labor, during which our parish community has searched for the best way to introduce our children to the mystery of Christ."⁹⁷ Both documents depicted Christ as someone who would bring redemption for the poor and oppressed in the world. In the manual, the authors depict the mission of the catechist to be in helping children understand that "Jesus absolutely does not want to invite the poor to resign themselves to their present hunger while in sight of the happiness in the rest of the world." Instead, when Jesus says blessed are the poor, he "wants to help the poor to find within themselves the strength to become 'free' and 'equal'."⁹⁸

⁹⁶ EM Documenti 085, "Lettera di un gruppo di sacerdoti a don Enzo," November 19, 1968.

⁹⁷ Comunità dell'Isolotto, *Incontro a Cristo* (Florence: Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 1968), 7.

⁹⁸ *Incontro a Cristo*, 42. For two diverse analyses of *Incontro a Cristo*, see Giuseppe De Rosa, S.I., "Il 'Catechismo' dell'Isolotto," in *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1, no. 1 (January 1969): 30-40 and Domenico Magrini, *Incontro o scontro con Cristo? A proposito del cosiddetto "Catechismo dell'Isolotto"* (Florence: Il Fauno Editore, 1969).

For Florit and other Church officials, the publication of *Incontro a Cristo* crossed a definitive line. While the events taking place in Isolotto, and the arguments being articulated by the faithful in the community, likely frustrated the archbishop, they nonetheless remained rather limited in scope. However, with the catechism, the community was making a more forceful and comprehensive theological argument that could undermine or contradict Church doctrine. While the faithful of Isolotto and Casella had been taking on more authority within the parish for years, the act of publishing a catechism without the archbishop's approval represented a highly public repudiation of Florit's authority and credibility. Indeed, the publication of *Incontro a Cristo*, more than any other action undertaken by the Catholics in Isolotto, most clearly depicted the community's break with the dominant ecclesiology of the Church and the power it invested in the office of bishop. With its catechism, the community was laying claim to the sacramental authority derived from God and challenging the notion of collegiality within the Church. For months, Florit, as archbishop, had provided Mazzi with time to reconsider his statements and actions. But with the publication of Isolotto's catechism, Florit had no other option than to respond forcefully and decisively to defend the Church.

Two days after the publication of *Incontro a Cristo*, Cardinal Florit distributed a notification addressed to all Florentine Catholics. In his message, the archbishop described Isolotto's text as a betrayal of the "Christian message by interpreting salvation only in a sociological sense, as a redemption of expression and exploitation." According to Florit, by emphasizing social and economic aspects and portraying Christ "only as a social agitator" and ignoring the resurrection of Christ and the salvation of sins, Isolotto's publication had "forgotten the fundamental core of Christianity." Florit expressed sadness at the creation of the text, as well as for the confusion it might create among the young Catholics who were meant to read it. Florit closed his notification

by declaring that Isolotto's text did not represent an authentic or "orthodox catechesis" and thus he "prohibited its adoption throughout the Archdiocese."⁹⁹

The efforts made by some Catholics to bridge the growing divide between the faithful in Isolotto and the ecclesiastical hierarchy in Florence ultimately failed to bring about a resolution by the end of November. Any chance of the parties finding common ground vanished with the community's publication of *Incontro a Cristo*, which essentially mandated Florit's severe response. Over the next two months, the fortitude of Catholics in Isolotto would continue to be tested. During this crucible of faith, they would gather in the one place in which they had spent the past decade forming a strong and united community based on the example set by Christ and, more recently, the experience of the Second Vatican Council. But in the next two months to come, Isolotto's church would become more than just a place of affirmation and community; it would become a site of contestation and confrontation, and ultimately, it would become a place off-limits to the faithful.

4. December 1968-January 1969

By December 2, when Cardinal Florit invited Enzo Mazzi to join him for a conversation, the tension between the faithful in Isolotto and ecclesiastical officials in Florence had reached a breaking point. In consultation with Paolo Caciolli, Sergio Gomiti, and a group of laity from both Isolotto and Casella, Mazzi agreed he should not meet alone with the archbishop. Instead, Mazzi's fellow priests and a small group of lay Catholics (men and women) accompanied him.¹⁰⁰ During the discussion, which included frank exchanges with Florit and Monsignor Giovanni Bianchi, the Vicar general of the archdiocese, the members of the laity spoke more frequently

⁹⁹ EM Documenti 087, "Notificazione della Curia Arcivescovile su 'Incontro a Gesù' il cosiddetto catechismo dell'Isolotto," November 28, 1968. The text of the notification can also be found in *Isolotto: 1954-1969* (241-243), *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio"* (74-75), and *L'Isolotto Documenti* (99-100).

¹⁰⁰ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 243.

than any of the three priests.¹⁰¹ At a certain point during the meeting, Florit asked to speak privately with Mazzi. It quickly became obvious to the priest the meeting had been nothing more than a pretense, as Florit had already decided to give Mazzi a second and more serious ultimatum: resign as parish priest of Isolotto or be dismissed. Nonetheless, Mazzi pressed Florit on his reasons for this course of action, questioning the archbishop's interpretation of previous actions taken by the community in Isolotto, especially the publication of *Incontro a Cristo*. Although Mazzi agreed to resign if Florit would first engage in an open dialogue with him and the faithful of Isolotto, something they had been requesting for months, Florit refused to accept the condition, declaring the possibility for such communication nonexistent as long as Mazzi remained parish priest. The meeting ended with Cardinal Florit telling Mazzi he would receive notification of his dismissal shortly.¹⁰²

Over the next two months, the religious community in Isolotto would lose both of its priests (in an official capacity) and would be locked out of its religious and social home, the parish church. After the removal of Mazzi as senior priest of Isolotto on December 4, the Florentine Curia attempted to normalize the situation in the parish by sending priests to celebrate Mass according to the regular schedule. But this intervention only served to antagonize the overwhelming majority of the faithful in Isolotto and their allies in other parishes in Florence and throughout Italy. During the next seven weeks, a number of highly public resignations by religious officials fueled the turmoil within the Florentine Church and the broader Catholic

¹⁰¹ *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 76-89. See also *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 244-253. This conversation was not recorded. Instead, when the lay Catholics left the meeting with Florit, they immediately wrote down their statements and questions to the best of their memory as well as comments made by others in the room, such as Florit and Bianchi. Thus, the documents found in the texts published by the community of Isolotto should not be viewed as transcripts. However, even if every word is not correct, the spirit of the conversation, as well as the main points, is quite clear.

¹⁰² EM Documenti 088, "Appunti manoscritti di Enzo Mazzi ripresi durante il colloquio col Cardinale Florit il giorno prima la rimozione," December 2, 1968. When the rest of his party left the room, Mazzi began to take notes of what was said by Florit and Monsignor Morozzi, the Chancellor of the Curia, who had entered when the others left. See also *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 83-89 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 253-259.

society in Italy. Despite interventions by bishops, and even Pope Paul VI, the distrust in Florence continued to escalate. Throughout this time period, the faithful in Isolotto and their supporters continued to gather in the parish church, not for the celebration of Mass by the hierarchy's appointed priests, but for prayer gatherings, discussions, and assemblies. Ultimately, the sacred space of Isolotto's church was not able to accommodate the needs and desires of both the community and the Florentine Curia. After a series of heated exchanges and confrontations within the church, ecclesiastical officials took possession of Isolotto's parish buildings. Four months after sending a letter supporting the Catholics who had occupied the cathedral in Parma, Isolotto's Catholics found themselves evicted from their own church.

On December 4, two days after his meeting with Cardinal Florit, Enzo Mazzi received the decree of removal as the parish priest of Isolotto. According to the decree, Mazzi was officially removed because his behavior and motivations represented a "serious and public disturbance of the ecclesial unity" in Florence.¹⁰³ In a personal note attached to the decree, Florit asserted he truly believed removal was in the best interests of both Mazzi and the community of Isolotto. Florit notified Mazzi he was nominating Monsignor Bruno Panerai as *Delegatus ad omnia* (the temporary head of the parish) effective immediately.¹⁰⁴ After the arrival of the removal order, Mazzi, Paolo Caciolli, and Sergio Gomiti wrote a letter to parishioners in Isolotto and Casella in which they described the meeting between Mazzi and Florit two days earlier, discussed the removal decree, and explained that both Caciolli and Gomiti expected to be removed from their positions in the following days. While the priests were saddened by the action taken by the

¹⁰³ EM Documenti 090, "Decreto di rimozione da parroco dell'Isolotto per Enzo Mazzi," December 4, 1968. See also *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 90; *L'Isolotto Documenti*, 101; *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 259-260.

¹⁰⁴ EM Documenti 089, "Lettera di accompagnamenti alla rimozione di Enzo Mazzi da parroco dell'Isolotto," December 3, 1968. See also *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 259.

archbishop, they were nonetheless proud that the faithful in Isolotto had become “a true fraternity, a firmness of spirit, a social and religious maturity to arouse universal wonder.”¹⁰⁵

By the end of the month, the statement by Gomiti and Caciolli regarding their professional status would be proven prophetic. On December 6, Sergio Gomiti sent a letter of resignation to Cardinal Florit.¹⁰⁶ Gomiti publicly announced his resignation the next day in a letter addressed to the parish of Casella. In a meeting a few days earlier, Gomiti had told Florit he always viewed Casella and Isolotto as one parish and thus the archbishop’s removal of Mazzi also meant a removal of him. Florit responded by telling Gomiti that if he wanted to stay in Casella or move to a larger parish, all he had to do was disavow his former statements and actions. If he was not prepared to do so, he would have to resign, as Florit did not consider him to have been removed.¹⁰⁷ Caciolli’s removal came later in the month, on Christmas Eve, when he received notice from the Florentine Curia he had been nominated for the position of Assistant Victor in the parish of San Felice in Piazza near the Pitti Palace on the south bank of the Arno River.¹⁰⁸ For a priest like Caciolli, who had always wanted to serve the poorest and most oppressed in society, assignment to a parish in a more historic and affluent section of Florence, and much closer to archdiocesan officials, must have been a difficult proposition.

Who had the authority to remove or relocate priests from a parish had been an issue of contention within the Catholic Church long before the 1960s. In recent years, the most famous case of this happening in Tuscany before Mazzi’s removal in 1968 was when officials sent Lorenzo Milani from San Donato in Calenzano to the remote and impoverished village of

¹⁰⁵ “A tutte le famiglie dell’Isolotto,” in *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 91-92. See also *L’Isolotto Documenti*, 103-104 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 260-261.

¹⁰⁶ EM Documenti 092, “Dimissioni di Sergio Gomiti da parroco della Casella,” December 6, 1968.

¹⁰⁷ EM Documenti 093, “Sergio Gomiti alle famiglie della Parrocchia della Casella. Perché mi sono dimesso,” December 7, 1968. See also *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 265-269. Gomiti’s letter was read during an assembly in Isolotto’s church on December 7.

¹⁰⁸ EM Documenti 100, “Lettera di Giovanni Bianchi a Paolo Caciolli e p.c. al can. Bruno Panerai con la quale si comunica il suo trasferimento presso S. Felice in Piazza,” December 24, 1968.

Barbiana in 1954. In addition to the priests in Isolotto and Casella, several other priests in Florence either resigned or threatened to do so in response to the Florentine Curia's handling of the situation in Isolotto and the removal of Mazzi. On December 8, Fabio Masi addressed a letter to the parish of Vingone. Masi argued that Florit and other officials had "rejected the religious experience of an entire population, that of Isolotto," and as a result had "broken the unity of the Christian people." Masi hoped to meet with groups of families over the next few days to see if the faithful were committed to continuing the path they had been on for four years. If not, Masi would be willing to resign as parish priest.¹⁰⁹ At the end of December, Bruno Borghi submitted his letter of resignation as parish priest of Quintole to Florit. Borghi outlined several reasons for deciding to quit, including his belief that the role of priest was in opposition to his desire to be a worker and solidarity with Mazzi, Caciolli, and Gomiti and the faithful of Isolotto and Casella.¹¹⁰ Finally, in early January, six members of the Diocesan Council of the Laity resigned in protest of the lack of communication from Cardinal Florit towards the requests of a group of Florentine priests.¹¹¹

Florit's dismissal of Mazzi sparked protests and demonstrations in Isolotto and other communities throughout Florence. In the days following Mazzi's removal, a group of community

¹⁰⁹ *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 120-122. Masi's letter was made public at the end of the month (*Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 309-311).

¹¹⁰ EM Documenti 104, "Lettera di Bruno Borghi a Enzo, Paolo, e Sergio sulla sua decisione di rassegnare le dimissioni da parroco," December 31, 1968. See also *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 130-131.

¹¹¹ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 328-329. In the small commune of San Quirino in the province of Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, a group of parishioners removed and hid three large bell clappers of their church in San Foca as a protest against the transfer of their priest to a community twenty-five miles away in the neighboring province of the Veneto. Upon learning of the transfer decision in early March 1969, many of the faithful initially tried to convince ecclesiastical officials to rescind the order. When attempts at dialogue failed, some individuals attempted to blow up the electrical system attached to the bells, an act that Don Giuseppe Pallarini deplored during his last sermon in San Foca. With the fate of their parish priest sealed, some among the faithful vented their dissatisfaction with the local ecclesiastical hierarchy by removing and hiding the bell clappers. The removal of the bell clappers represented an attempt by the faithful to gain, and demonstrate, a say in their church and community. Without the clappers, the bells, an important part of the church building that has historically been blessed, could not be rung to announce the times of services or other special gatherings. Thus, with their act, the faithful were physically and symbolically taking control of when they assembled ("Rubati dai parrocciani i battagli delle campane," *La Nazione*, March 17, 1969).

members issued several public appeals in which they condemned Florit's action and asked workers, students, priests, and every Christian in other parishes and quarters of Florence to discuss the events of Isolotto and debate the steps the Church should take in order to serve those most in need.¹¹² Students at the elementary and middle schools in Isolotto, with the support of their parents and teachers, boycotted classes on the morning of December 5, choosing instead to gather in the Church piazza and then march to the headquarters of the archdiocese where they prayed silently for five minutes before placing signs they had carried at the building's main door.¹¹³ Three days later, instead of attending Mass in their churches, a large group of faithful from Isolotto and Casella, along with others from Florence and other Italian cities, marched from Isolotto's piazza to the Piazza del Duomo in the center of the city, a distance of over three miles.¹¹⁴ During the march, participants passed through working-class neighborhoods such as Pignone and San Frediano. Upon arrival at the Duomo, the marchers recited the Our Father prayer, read the notes of the meeting between Mazzi and Florit on December 2, and began to collect signatures of those calling for the cardinal's resignation.¹¹⁵ Later in the month, a group of Isolotto workers organized an assembly for the evening of the nineteenth in the parish church of Rifredi, a working-class community across the Arno River. In the flyers announcing the

¹¹² EM Documenti 091, "Volantino di solidarietà a Enzo Mazzi e sciopero delle scuole," December 4, 1968. See also: "Appello" in *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 93 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969,* 261-263.

¹¹³ EM CICL 0008/2, "A tutte le famiglie dell'Isolotto, marcia verso la Curia," December 5, 1968 and EM Notiziario 08, December 6, 1968. See also *Isolotto: 1954-1969,* 263-265. For coverage of this event in the press, see GR 0219, "Destituito don Mazzi-corteo di cattolici al Vescovado contro il decreto del cardinal," *L'Unità,* December 6, 1968 and GR 0220, "La folla dimostra davanti alla curia," *Il Lavoro,* December 6, 1968. On May 23, 1969, six members of the community of Isolotto were indicted for "the promotion of non-authorized demonstrations" and "disparaging the religion of the State" in regards to the December 6, 1968 school strike and march through Florence. Ultimately, all six defendants were given amnesty when the judge determined the "object of protection is the religious sentiment of the people, not the prestige of the hierarchy" (*Comunità dell'Isolotto: Isolotto Sotto Processo* (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1971), 134).

¹¹⁴ EM CICL 0009, "Marcia dell'Isolotto," December 8, 1968. In advance of the march, the organizers announced the path and rules of behavior for participants via leaflets.

¹¹⁵ *Isolotto: 1954-1969,* 276. See also: GR 0241, "Florit in Duomo. Fuori lo contestano," *La Nazione Sera,* December 9, 1968; GR 0242, "Le dimissioni di Florit richieste da migliaia di cattolici a Firenze," *L'Unità,* December 9, 1968; and GR 0244, "A Firenze si raccolgono firme perché il card. Florit si dimetta," *Stampa Sera,* December 9, 1968.

assembly, the planners highlighted how the Florentine Church had condemned other priests in the past, such as Lorenzo Milani and Bruno Borghi. They also hailed the support Mazzi and the faithful in Isolotto had provided to workers over the years, especially when workers at Galileo and FIVRE were threatened with layoffs, or dismissed, in 1959 and 1963 respectively. They called for workers to show up to support Mazzi and to join the call for Florit's resignation.¹¹⁶

In addition to these forms of protest, the faithful of Isolotto continued to publish the community *Notiziari* (newsletters) on a regular basis. Between Mazzi's removal as parish priest in early December and the Florentine Curia's closure of the parish church in late January, the community printed and circulated fourteen newsletters, as well as other texts and leaflets. In these newsletters, the community published news of recent actions as well as announcements of upcoming meetings and protests, copies of letters from supporters such as the German theologian Hans Küng, notes and analyses of meetings with Florit and Paul VI, and summaries of assemblies held in Isolotto's church. The community also continued the practice of criticizing what they deemed to be incorrect or biased coverage by newspapers and journals, especially those affiliated with, or supportive of, the institutional Church. Even after ecclesiastical officials in Florence closed Isolotto's church, the community continued to publish their newsletters on a regular basis.¹¹⁷

Amidst the turmoil caused by Florit's dismissal of Mazzi and the subsequent protests, several high-ranking Church officials attempted to find a resolution to the situation in Isolotto and the Florentine Church. On December 16, Archbishop Salvatore Baldassarri of Ravenna sent a letter

¹¹⁶ EM Documenti 099, "A tutti I lavoratori. Assemblea dei lavoratori alla S.M.S. di Rifredi. Il Vescovo ha colpito tutti noi operai," December 19, 1968. See also *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 100-101.

¹¹⁷ The community published *Notiziario* #8 (EM *Notiziario* 8) on December 6 and *Notiziario* #21 (EM *Notiziario* 21) on January 23. All of these newsletters are within what the community considers to be the first series of newsletters (there are three total series). The letter from Hans Küng, dated November 12, was included in *Notiziario* #9 (EM *Notiziario* 9). Discussions of meetings with Pope Paul VI and Cardinal Florit were published in *Notiziario* #13 (EM *Notiziario* 13) and *Notiziario* #17 (EM *Notiziario* 17) respectively.

to Mazzi, with whom he had previously communicated. In his letter, Baldassarri proposed some solutions he believed would allow the faithful of Isolotto to adhere to their beliefs and allow Florit to retain his authority and autonomy.¹¹⁸ A few days later, Mazzi received a letter from Pope Paul VI. The pope encouraged Mazzi, in the spirit of Christmas, to meet with Florit and find a way to reconcile with the archbishop.¹¹⁹ Upon receiving the pope's letter, Mazzi met with Sergio Gomiti, Paolo Caciolli, and a group of laity from Isolotto and Casella. They decided to send a delegation of faithful from both communities, along with the three priests, to try and meet with Paul VI in order to articulate their story, concerns, and desires. On December 20, Mazzi and Gomiti sent a telegram to the pope asking for an audience the next day.¹²⁰

When the group of twenty-six Catholics arrived at the Vatican, they were met by Giovanni Benelli, the Deputy of the Secretariat of State. Benelli relayed a message from Paul VI to Mazzi that urged the priest to meet with Florit to seek a solution to the impasse since the archbishop retained the authority to retract the dismissal. Once Mazzi had met with Florit, then, as Benelli noted, "we are here to help."¹²¹ As they did in the meeting with Florit at the beginning of December, the laity present at the Vatican depicted the situation in Isolotto as a crisis that was larger than a personal conflict between two men. Rather, they told Benelli the problem was "the human and Christian relationship between the Bishop [and] the parish of 10,000 souls."¹²² Those present repeatedly affirmed they wanted to live peacefully and harmoniously within the Church. However, they remained frustrated by Florit's repeated refusals to visit the communities of Isolotto and Casella, noting that the only time he came was on the order of Cardinal Della

¹¹⁸ EM Documenti 095, "Lettera a Enzo Mazzi di mons. Baldassarri Vescovo di Ravenna," December 16, 1968.

¹¹⁹ EM Documenti 096, "Lettera di Paolo VI a don Enzo Mazzi," December 19, 1968.

¹²⁰ EM Documenti 097, "Telegramma di Enzo Mazzi e Sergio Gomiti a Paolo VI per avere udienza in Vaticano," December 19, 1968. See also *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 280-281.

¹²¹ "Colloquio in Vaticano con Mons. Benelli sostituto della Segreteria di Stato di Sua Santità Paolo VI" in *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 102. Benelli succeeded Florit as the Archbishop of Florence on June 3, 1977.

¹²² *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 105.

Costa.¹²³ Furthermore, they expressed wonderment at Florit's demand that Mazzi retract his statements and apologize for his previous actions since to them such a reversal would mean Mazzi was rejecting fifteen years of experience and the community's maturation during that period. As one parishioner, Urbano, articulated, such a deed would be the equivalent of Mazzi turning to him and the other faithful and saying:

I made a mistake when I married you for free...when I baptized you and when I buried your dead without asking for a fee. I made a mistake when I explained to you in church the social encyclicals... I made a mistake, for the same motive, to go to live in a basement and sleep on a sofa bed... I made a mistake to not construct a beautiful sports field on the grounds of the parish so I could instead make room for a workshop for the handicapped who have regained themselves, [and] their dignity.¹²⁴

Towards the end of the meeting, the discussion became heated when several lay Catholics criticized the role of the hierarchy in the institutional Church and Benelli responded forcefully in defense of ecclesiastical authority. Ultimately, even after another plea to meet with Paul VI to discuss the issue further, the group from Isolotto and Casella left without talking with the pope.¹²⁵ The day after the delegation's meeting with Benelli, Mazzi followed Paul VI's recommendation and met with Florit in Florence. While both individuals expressed a desire to resolve the situation, Mazzi refused to retract his previous statements and renounce his actions and Florit continued to insist he had to "defend the doctrine and discipline" within the Church. Florit closed the meeting by inviting Mazzi to participate in the celebration of Christmas Mass with him, but Mazzi refused the offer.¹²⁶

¹²³ *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 107.

¹²⁴ *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 106.

¹²⁵ *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 111. A "transcript" of the meeting with Benelli was published in an edition of the community's *Notizario* within the next day (EM *Notiziario* 13 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 281-294). As with the conversation with Florit at the beginning of December, the conversation with Benelli was not recorded. Instead, when the lay Catholics and priests left the meeting they immediately wrote down their statements and questions to the best of their memory as well as comments made by others in the room. Thus, the documents found in the texts published by the community of Isolotto should not be viewed as transcripts.

¹²⁶ *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 112-114 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 295-297.

In the weeks following Mazzi's removal on December 4, the importance of Isolotto's church as the religious and social heart of the community was reinforced on an almost daily basis. During the first half of December, massive crowds of residents and supporters from other areas of Florence gathered in the church for assemblies of solidarity. After these assemblies, the community released statements, often signed, summarizing the discussions and including copies of letters they had received and texts they had discussed. In the document released after an assembly on December 7, the faithful in attendance argued Florit's removal of Mazzi represented an attack against the "entire community and its desire to plainly live the Gospel." They blamed Florit for rupturing the communion between laity and bishop, and given the long history of paternalism and authoritarianism from the bishop, they called on him to resign.¹²⁷ A few days later, after another assembly on December 11, the faithful of Isolotto expressed concerns about the new religious life in the parish and the observance of Mass. For many in the community, the Mass became a symbol of division after Mazzi's dismissal. Along with his order of removal for Mazzi, Florit had assigned Monsignor Bruno Panerai to be the temporary head of the parish. Panerai had arrived on the evening of December 6 to celebrate the seven o'clock Mass, but after a two-hour conversation with the faithful present in the church, decided not to continue with his plans.¹²⁸ A few days later, Panerai sent a letter to Mazzi in which he complained about the difficulties celebrating Mass in Isolotto, especially given that the faithful all still expressed loyalty towards their longtime priest.¹²⁹ In a statement released after the December 11 assembly, the community questioned whether Panerai "fully understood deep down the religious soul of the

¹²⁷ EM CICL 0008/4, "Il cardinal ha rimosso d'autorità i nostri sacerdoti," December 7, 1968. See also *L'Isolotto Documenti*, 105-6 and *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 94-95. After another assembly on December 13, the community once again released a statement calling for Florit to resign because of all the "structures that prevent an authentic preaching of the Gospel and so they can all finally return together united in an ecclesial community that truly announces evangelical values" (*L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 98-99).

¹²⁸ *Isolotto Sotto Processo*, 109.

¹²⁹ EM Documenti 094, "Don Panerai a don Enzo, si lamenta della situazione difficoltosa a cui deve fare fronte," December 11, 1968.

people.” They claimed they were suffering without the Mass, but they rejected the “hypocrisy” of celebrations offered by Curia-appointed priests and refused to travel to another church. Those in attendance at the assembly hoped all in the community would recognize the suffering of the people and demonstrate their solidarity by boycotting the celebration of the Mass in Isolotto.¹³⁰

A day after the faithful in Isolotto called for their fellow Catholics to refuse to celebrate the Mass in the parish church, Panerai moved services to a small chapel outside the quarter. In a statement to the press, Panerai argued he had to make the change as the presence of a large number of parishioners in the church for prayer assemblies prevented him from “guaranteeing an orderly and decorous unfolding” of the Mass. The next day, Sunday, December 15, while Panerai celebrated Mass outside the community, roughly two thousand people gathered in Isolotto’s church for prayer assemblies and the reading of Bible passages in the morning and afternoon.¹³¹

An inability to properly celebrate the Mass in the community church quickly became a secondary concern after the Florentine Curia notified Mazzi of their intent to take possession of Isolotto’s church and other parish buildings on the morning of December 24.¹³² On December 22, Monsignor Panerai and another priest returned to Isolotto’s church to celebrate Mass at nine o’clock in the morning. According to community sources, approximately fifty people attended the Mass, and of those only a few were residents of Isolotto. Two hours later, nearly two thousand community members and supporters gathered in the church for another prayer assembly. The community held another assembly in the afternoon when nearly five hundred people attended. Some residents noted that a police van was stationed outside the church in the

¹³⁰ EM CICL 0010, “Verbale della riunione dell’11.12.68 e firme raccolte per le dimissioni del cardinale,” December 13, 1968. See also *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 96-97.

¹³¹ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 279.

¹³² EM Documenti 098, “Notifica della Curia per la riconsegna delle temporalità il 24.12 ore 8,30. La lettera è consegnata a mano il 24.12.68,” December 21, 1968.

piazza during both assemblies.¹³³ On the morning of Christmas Eve, Panerai and two functionaries from the Curia arrived at Isolotto's church to take possession of the parish buildings and the church keys. However, faced with a crowd of parishioners, the officials ultimately left without completing the takeover.¹³⁴

While the faithful of Isolotto were still able to gather in the parish church on Christmas Day, there was no celebration of the Mass that day or in the days to come. Instead, the community held prayer assemblies and discussions on December 25, 26, and 28. At the December 26 assembly, Spanish theologian J.M. González Ruiz addressed nearly two thousand residents and supporters. In his discussion of the situation in Isolotto and Florence, González Ruiz repeatedly critiqued the positions and actions of Church officials. Citing St. Paul, he argued that "ecclesial formation is only obtained when pastors have renounced the idols of 'prestige' and 'dignity'." Refuting the criticisms repeatedly levied against the priests and faithful of Isolotto, González Ruiz declared that "even though an attitude of rebellion or slightly schismatic is far from our thoughts, we believe a hurried acceptance of unresolved conditions for the sake of diplomatic reconciliation is a betrayal of the Gospel and a true ecclesial disobedience."¹³⁵ After the December 28 assembly, the community released a statement declaring their "pastoral line would continue" and that they would continue to "refuse the authoritarianism of the hierarchy." Furthermore, they reiterated that like the Global Church should be, Isolotto's "church remains open to all and will remain open to all despite what canonical law dictates."¹³⁶

The morning of Sunday, December 29 began as had previous days that month. Yet the events of that day would be fiercely disputed and have long-lasting repercussions for the

¹³³ *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 13 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 294.

¹³⁴ *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 13 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 298.

¹³⁵ EM CICL 3, "José Maria Gonzales Ruiz è venuto all'Isolotto e ha parlato in Chiesa dell'assemblea del 26 dicembre," December 26, 1968. See also *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 115-117 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 299-301.

¹³⁶ *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 118-119 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 302.

religious community in Isolotto. That morning, monsignors Alba and Panerai celebrated Mass at seven o'clock, nine o'clock, and eleven o'clock, each time with a small contingent of parishioners, most of them from outside of Isolotto. According to residents in Isolotto, a few of those attending the eleven o'clock Mass were noted members of the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI), a neo-fascist party. Throughout the morning, over one thousand parishioners from Isolotto and other parts of Florence read Bible passages in the churchyard. At noon, the community members and their supporters entered the church to hold an assembly. Monsignor Alba celebrated another Mass for approximately fifty parishioners while the others gathered nearby. At the conclusion of the Mass, supporters of Mazzi and the faithful in Isolotto claimed that a few of those who had attended the celebration made "obscene gestures and serious provocations" towards those gathered in the church.¹³⁷

After the confrontation at noon, a group of faithful in Isolotto circulated a leaflet describing the presence of MSI activists and leaders and their provocations as "painful episodes" that had "severely offended" the People of God. The group encouraged residents of Isolotto and those who supported their cause to gather in the church that evening for an assembly.¹³⁸ The next day, the Isolotto sections of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), and the Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity (PSIUP) published a document in support of those in the community who were engaging in a "battle against the authoritarian structures of the Church" and their neo-fascist allies. The sections declared "the democratic and antifascist parties will no longer tolerate actions" such as those committed in Isolotto's church.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 303. Later that evening, officiants appointed by the Curia celebrated another Mass at six o'clock while a large crowd of parishioners remained in and around the church.

¹³⁸ EM CICL 0010/1, "Grave provocazione e offesa verso il popolo dell'Isolotto," December 29, 1968. See also *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 127.

¹³⁹ EM Documenti 107, "Volantino nel quale si denunciano provocazioni fasciste all'Isolotto," December 30, 1968. See also GR 0322, "Grave episodio all'Isolotto," *L'Unità*, December 31, 1968 and *Isolotto Sotto Processo*, 120-121.

Not surprisingly, ecclesiastical officials in Florence and their allies did not share this interpretation of the events of December 29. The Curia released a statement in which they questioned the legality and appropriateness of the gathering in the church by Isolotto's community members as well as the underlying motivations for the event. They deplored the interference of the celebration of the Mass by "a group of people who claimed to hold in the sacred place a contemporaneous 'assembly' with the Holy Mass, contesting, then, the regular liturgical celebration with pretexts of a political nature."¹⁴⁰ With their statement, the Curia portrayed those who gathered in the church as outsiders who were more concerned with social and partisan concerns than religious matters.

The day after the confrontation in the church, Professor Alfonso Ughi, an official in the MSI who was one of the parishioners from outside Isolotto who attended the celebration of the Mass at noon, sent a letter to the Public Prosecutor's office denouncing the actions of some from the community. In his statement, Ughi argued a crowd no larger than two hundred people entered the church after the Mass had begun, went to the microphone a few meters from the altar, and announced the beginning of a prayer assembly. In addition, a smaller "group of occupiers of the church" positioned themselves at the same microphone, "turning their back to the officiant, with a clear gesture of provocation and contempt."¹⁴¹ By describing the size of the crowd gathered in the church as much smaller than what was articulated by community sources and a variety of newspapers, Ughi attempted to label these faithful as an insignificant and disgruntled minority opposed to the Curia. It is also important to note how Ughi describes the supposed gestures of some in the crowd. Ughi argues that turning one's back to an officiant is an offensive sign. Ironically, it was just a few years earlier that calls for liturgical reform, including the priest

¹⁴⁰ *L'Isolotto e "il popolo di Dio,"* 126.

¹⁴¹ EM Processo 001, "Denuncia del dott. Ughi al Procuratore della Repubblica," December 30, 1968. See also *Isolotto Sotto Processo*, 114-116.

facing the faithful during the celebration of the Mass, were officially sanctioned by the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) and subsequent apostolic letters and instructions.¹⁴² According to Ughi, some individuals within this group "drowned out the voice of the celebrant" by shouting their condemnation of the Mass, claiming it was "a sacrilege... an offense, a challenge, a provocation; and for us a blasphemy." Ughi maintained that throughout this confrontation the Curia-appointed officiants remained calm and professional.¹⁴³

In an article published the next day, *La Nazione* corroborated much of Ughi's account. The article also claimed that Paolo Caciolli publicly confronted Monsignor Alba in the church, telling him he had possession of the keys to the sacristy, where the sacred vestments could be found, and that he, "interpreting the sentiment of the faithful present" in the church, "would not give them to [Alba]." Furthermore, *La Nazione* claimed that Caciolli declared since "the Cardinal has not removed me; I, as assistant parish priest, in the absence of Monsignor Panerai, have the responsibility of the church."¹⁴⁴ Other newspapers such as *Paese Sera* and *L'Unità* covered the dramatic confrontation in Isolotto's church on December 29, but focused most of the attention on the presence and actions of the neo-fascists in the sacred space.¹⁴⁵

Also on December 29, Enzo Mazzi sent Florit a letter in which he described the events of Christmas Eve day when Panerai attempted to take possession of Isolotto's church. Mazzi lamented that Panerai and other officials appeared "without warning" to carry out an act that

¹⁴² Pope Paul VI promulgated *Sacrosanctum Concilium* on December 4, 1963 and issued his apostolic letter, *Sacram Liturgiam*, on January 25, 1964. The Sacred Congregation for Rites issued the First Instruction on the Proper Implementation of the Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy, *Inter oecumenici*, on September 26, 1964. The changes were to be implemented by the beginning of Lent in March 1965.

¹⁴³ EM Processo 001, "Denuncia del dott. Ughi al Procuratore della Repubblica," December 30, 1968. See also *Isolotto Sotto Processo*, 114-116.

¹⁴⁴ GR 0314, "Messe drammatiche all'Isolotto," *La Nazione sera*, December 30, 1968. See also *Isolotto Sotto Processo*, 116-118.

¹⁴⁵ GR 0315, "Ore di tensione all'Isolotto," *Paese Sera*, December 30, 1968 and GR 0316, "Provocazione missina all'Isolotto," *L'Unità*, December 30, 1968.

would “not help reconciliation, but rather confirmed and aggravated the rejection of which the people feel unfairly struck.” Furthermore, Mazzi decried the heavy police presence outside the church and his personal residence. Mazzi saw these events as exposing “a sad reality,” that the “parish belongs to the Curia, it is not at the service of the People of God, who have no right to the property of the parish and can even be evicted from the building of the Church.” Mazzi concluded his letter to the archbishop by stating the faithful of Isolotto would continue to use the parish buildings in the manner that “best respects the dignity of the laity, as well as the just demands and experience of the evangelical life of the People of God.”¹⁴⁶

The following day, Mazzi received Florit’s response, as well as a telegram from Monsignor Bianchi. In his letter, the archbishop stated he was not acting any differently towards the community in Isolotto, by attempting to take possession of the parish buildings, than he would any parish “when they remain vacant.” Florit reminded Mazzi that Isolotto’s church represented “a moral entity erected by the Bishop... with the aim of securing worship and religious assistance to parishioners with free access to all the faithful.” The archbishop assured Mazzi his successor would study all the religious and social initiatives the priest had initiated in Isolotto. Finally, expressing concern for Mazzi’s health, Florit invited him to rest at the archdiocese’s residence for priests until he felt better. The archbishop also reaffirmed he still considered Mazzi “one of his priests.”¹⁴⁷

Compared to Cardinal Florit’s letter, Monsignor Bianchi’s telegram was concise. He notified Mazzi that the handover of Isolotto’s church would happen on the morning of December

¹⁴⁶ EM Documenti 102, “Lettera a[l Card. Ermenegildo] Florit di Enzo Mazzi sui modi irrispettosi usati dalla Curia,” December 29, 1968. See also *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 123-125 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 303-307. Mazzi attached to his letter a summary of the initiatives taken by the community of Isolotto since its founding in 1954.

¹⁴⁷ EM Documenti 108, “Lettera del Card. Ermenegildo Florit a don Mazzi sul passaggio delle temporalità,” December 30, 1968. See also *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 308-309.

31.¹⁴⁸ After receiving the telegram, Mazzi notified the community and at an emergency assembly that evening, he declared the faithful should be present in their church when the Curia's representatives arrived. The next morning, approximately one hundred people constituting a cross-section of the community (workers, women, students, and business owners) were waiting in the church when Panerai and other officials from the Curia and Prefecture arrived. Panerai refused to complete the handover of the keys in the presence of such a large group, claiming it to be a "private act... involving only the parish priest." In response, the faithful refused to be excluded from an action that contradicted their communal and religious experience of nearly fifteen years. After conferring with the assistant Bishop, the Curia officials remained in the church, waiting for the people to leave so they could finalize the handover of the parish buildings. Yet the laity did not leave their church. During the standoff, some of those present asked Monsignor Panerai to keep the church open to the faithful who want to gather for assemblies and prayer discussions on holidays and weekends after the celebration of the Mass at seven o'clock and nine o'clock. Panerai declared he would pass this request on to Cardinal Florit. Ultimately, the Curia officials left Isolotto's church without executing the handover of the building. That evening, over one thousand parishioners gathered in the church to listen to a reading of Florit's letter from December 30 and Bruno Borghi's letter to the priests of Isolotto and Casella explaining his decision to resign as parish priest.¹⁴⁹ After a period of discussion, those present decided to continue to assemble in the church for prayer discussions between the celebrations of Mass until they heard otherwise.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ EM Documenti 103, "Telegramma del Vescovo Ausiliare per la riconsegna delle temporalità il giorno successive 31 dicembre ore 8,30," December 30, 1968.

¹⁴⁹ EM Documenti 104, "Lettera di Bruno Borghi a Enzo, Paolo e Sergio sulla sua decisione di rassegnare le dimissioni da parroco," December 30, 1968.

¹⁵⁰ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 313-315. See also: "La chiesa ridata alla Curia ma la contestazione cresce," *Il Lavoro, Cronaca di Firenze*, January 2, 1969 and "La comunità teme un'azione di forza," *Il Lavoro, Cronaca di Firenze*, January 2, 1969.

During the first few weeks of January, the faithful of Isolotto and their supporters continued to assert their presence in the church on a daily basis. This resulted in a number of confrontations with Curia-appointed priests and those Catholics wanting to celebrate the Mass. On the morning of January 1, a large crowd gathered for the reading of Bible passages. When Monsignor Alba entered to celebrate the eleven o'clock Mass, the faithful exited the church into the cold. At the conclusion of the Mass forty-five minutes later, for which only a small group of Catholics had remained, the crowd of faithful, now numbering between one and two thousand, reentered the church and asked Alba if he would cancel the celebration of the Mass at noon so the group could continue their gathering. According to the community, Alba responded by yelling that he had been "instructed to warn [them] that it is not possible to hold a Catholic religious function in a Catholic church and then a protestant one in the same Catholic church." Alba then proceeded to celebrate the Mass at noon and twice later that evening, with the massive crowd entering and leaving Isolotto's church in between services.¹⁵¹

The next clash between the community and the Curia occurred four days later, on January 5. The day before, at another massive assembly in Isolotto's church, several thousand residents and their supporters, some of whom had to stand outside, decided they would no longer leave the church during the celebration of Masses since the building, like the Church, was for all and not just a small group of Catholics supportive of the Florentine hierarchy.¹⁵² The same day, January 4, the community published another *Notizario* in which they discussed a letter sent to Catholics in Isolotto and other Florentine communities. The letter, signed by "The Catholic Group of San Giovanni da Capestrano," encouraged Catholics to attend and "take an active part" in the

¹⁵¹ *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 315-316. See also GR 0332, "Sabotata dalla Curia le assemblee dei parrocchiani," *L'Unità*, January 2, 1969; GR 0337, "Commandos all'Isolotto aumentano la tensione," *Il Lavoro*, January 4, 1969; *Isolotto Sotto Processo*, 122.

¹⁵² *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 319.

celebration of the Mass at eleven o'clock in the morning and noon in Isolotto's church. The group expressed their adoration for Cardinal Florit and their faithfulness "to the lines drawn by the Second Vatican Council." In the newsletter the community of Isolotto expressed offense at the call to action in the letter, but reaffirmed their "determination to defend themselves without allowing themselves to be dragged into violence, against every provocation."¹⁵³

The residents of Isolotto awoke on the morning of January 5 to discover that vandals had targeted their church, setting fire to the newspapers posted on wooden panels in front of the church and cutting the rope for the church bells. The group responsible for this action also attached copies of a flyer to the church doors and spread more copies throughout the churchyard. In the manifesto, the authors, the Florentine Action Squads, called on all Florentines and Italians to act in the face of a "gang of thugs, exploited by anti-nationalist parties and subversive priests, [who] undermine religion, insult citizens, debase the authorities, offend the military, and want a disarmed Police." The groups declared their willingness to "take all the necessary actions" to support and promote law and order.¹⁵⁴

The first two Masses held on Sunday, January 5 were sparsely attended and progressed uninterrupted. However, shortly after ten o'clock, nearly two thousand people entered Isolotto's church to hold a prayer gathering. At eleven o'clock, Monsignor Alba stepped to the microphone and announced his intention to begin the Mass. Someone in the crowd shouted back they didn't want the Mass to be celebrated by Alba. After disagreeing with that sentiment, Alba asked for a display of who didn't want the Mass to occur. According to community sources, "two thousand

¹⁵³ EM Notiziario 17, January 4, 1969. See also: GR 0338/1, "Gruppi di destra preparano provocazioni anti-Isolotto," *L'Unità*, January 4, 1969; GR 0341, "Tesa vigilia all'Isolotto per le messe di stamani," *La Nazione*, January 5, 1969; *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 316-319; *Isolotto Sotto Processo*, 122-123.

¹⁵⁴ EM Documenti 109, "Foto del volantino affisso alle mura della chiesa nella notte tra il 4 e il 5 gennaio 1969 da parte di squadre fasciste," January 5, 1969 and *Isolotto Sotto Processo*, 123-124.

people raised their hand.” Alba then gathered the vestments and left Isolotto’s church. He did not return, nor did any other Curia priest, to celebrate the Mass later in the day.¹⁵⁵

After Alba left Isolotto’s church, those present agreed to send a delegation of laity to meet with Florit (and Bianchi) to explain what had happened that morning and restate their willingness to find a resolution with the Cardinal. As soon as the meeting began, the conversation quickly became heated, with Florit demanding the faithful in Isolotto express their obedience to his authority and the lay Catholics accusing Florit of hypocrisy and betrayal of the teachings of the Second Vatican Council.¹⁵⁶ On January 6, the Florentine Curia publicly commented on the previous day’s meeting with the laity from Isolotto and Casella. The statement claimed that Florit had affirmed his decision to remove Mazzi was “permanent.” Furthermore, it blamed those in the “so-called ‘assembly’” in Isolotto’s church for “physically opposing the priest” who was trying to celebrate the Mass.¹⁵⁷ A group of community members from Isolotto responded to this statement in a *Notiziario* published on January 13. They disputed the Curia’s comments regarding the confrontation between Alba and the faithful in the church and rejected attempts by ecclesiastical officials to diminish the power of the assembly with qualifiers.¹⁵⁸

Two days after this latest confrontation in Isolotto’s church, Monsignor Alba gave evidence against a crowd of parishioners, who he claimed had blocked his access to the altar, prevented the celebration of the Mass, and later physically assaulted him as he tried to leave the

¹⁵⁵ GR 0348, “Isolotto: le votazioni in chiesa contro la messa,” *Il Resto del Carlino*, January 6, 1969; GR 0349, “Dopo le provocazioni fasciste. Riunione di preghiera ieri all’Isolotto,” *L’Unità*, January 6, 1969; *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 320.

¹⁵⁶ *L’Isolotto e “il popolo di Dio,”* 132-138 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 320-327.

¹⁵⁷ GR 0345, “Messi impediti all’Isolotto. Parrocchiani dal cardinal,” *La Nazione Sera*, January 6, 1969, 11.

¹⁵⁸ EM *Notiziario* 18, January 13, 1969 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 330-331.

building.¹⁵⁹ On January 14, Florentine authorities charged sixteen people (eleven lay Catholics and five priests) with the crimes of “instigation to delinquency” and “disturbing a religious function.”¹⁶⁰ The following day, a group of thirty Catholics from Isolotto and Casella delivered a “Letter of Corresponsibility” to the prosecutor, which, although testifying to the peaceful nature of the assembly in question, accepted full responsibility, alongside their brothers and sisters in faith, for any violation of the law.¹⁶¹ Over the next few months, nearly one thousand Florentines would add their signatures to the letter.¹⁶²

After the confrontation in Isolotto’s church on January 5, the Curia once again attempted to take possession of the parish buildings. On January 10, Panerai and the parish priest of Ricorboli arrived in the church and were once again met by Enzo Mazzi and a group of laity. As had happened in the past, Panerai refused to complete the handover in the presence of lay Catholics.¹⁶³ A little more than a week later, on January 19, Mazzi received a brief letter from Monsignor Bianchi informing the priest that no one from the community would be allowed to assemble in the church without an approved delegate of Cardinal Florit. Furthermore, Bianchi reminded Mazzi the continued presence of individuals, whether priests or lay Catholics, living in the canonical house was “abusive and illegitimate.” Bianchi closed his letter by demanding the

¹⁵⁹ EM Processo 004, “Trascrizione dell’interrogatorio di don Alba,” January 7, 1969 and *Isolotto: Sotto Processo*, 128-133.

¹⁶⁰ EM Processo 005, “Ordine di comparizione,” January 15-17, 1969; *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 331; *Isolotto Sotto Processo*, 132-133.

¹⁶¹ EM Processo 006, “Documento di corresponsabilità,” January 1969; *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 332-334.

¹⁶² Of these, the Attorney General’s office ultimately indicted 438 individuals. By July of 1971, 429 of the people indicted had been granted amnesty for various reasons. Only nine people actually faced trial. Ultimately, all of the defendants were acquitted for not having committed the offenses (*Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 332-334).

¹⁶³ EM Notiziario 18, January 13, 1969. See also GR 0360, “Monsignor Panerai torna all’Isolotto,” *Il Lavoro*, January 11, 1969 and *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 327-331.

keys to the church be handed over to the Curia and the buildings emptied within five days. Failure to do so would result in further actions taken by Church officials.¹⁶⁴

Stunned by Panerai's threat, Mazzi and a few members of the faithful requested a meeting with Cardinal Florit to discuss the content of the letter. Panerai refused to allow such a discussion.¹⁶⁵ On the evening of January 21, a large number of the faithful in Isolotto gathered in the church to discuss the situation. Those present ultimately decided to invite Monsignor Panerai to the church the following day to hand over the keys.¹⁶⁶

At ten o'clock on the evening of January 22, Monsignor Panerai and a delegate of the administrative office of the Florentine Curia arrived at the church to execute the act of the return of the keys. Waiting for them was an assembly of nearly two thousand parishioners and the former parish priests of Isolotto, Enzo Mazzi and Paolo Caciolli. Addressing the crowd, Panerai declared that this transaction did not represent the end of all the good initiatives and experiences that had happened in Isolotto. Not surprisingly, Panerai's attempt at conciliation was met with outbursts of frustration and disbelief by some community members. Mazzi quickly stepped to the microphone. Twelve years after he delivered his first sermon in the newly-constructed church, Mazzi once again addressed the faithful. He stressed that they had suffered, bled, and lived in pain for years, and especially the recent past, "at the sight of the people not counting for anything [and] not existing in the Church." Mazzi questioned the sincerity of Panerai and the Florentine Curia, stating that if ecclesiastical officials "wanted to continue our experience, why not send to Isolotto one of those priests that had been rejected, condemned, and called to court." For fifteen

¹⁶⁴ EM Documenti 111, "Lettera di Giovanni Bianchi Vescovo Ausiliare e Vicario Generale a don Mazzi, intima la riconsegna delle chiavi della chiesa e della canonica," January 18, 1969 and GR 0397, "Ultimatum a don Mazzi," *La Nazione*, January 21, 1969. See also *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 336.

¹⁶⁵ GR 0404, "Insistono nel chiedere un incontro con Florit," *La Nazione*, January 22, 1969. See also *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 336-337.

¹⁶⁶ GR 0405, "La chiesa dell'Isolotto stasera torna alla curia," *La Nazione Sera*, January 23, 1969 and GR 0406, "Il popolo darà le chiavi al delegato del cardinale?," *Il Lavoro*, January 23, 1969. See also *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 337.

years, the faithful of Isolotto “have wanted and want that the Church will be a family...they want to listen, and to be listened to.” In the end, Mazzi considered the events of that day to be a positive step forward in their communal walk, since “with this eviction... [God had] granted their prayers.” Mazzi ended his comments by talking about how fear led Christ’s disciples to turn on him, and how fear had led to persecution throughout the centuries. Turning to the faithful, he instructed them to “free themselves from fear.” After Mazzi fell silent, the two thousand parishioners repeated the words spoken by a layperson:

We, an assembly of the people of God of Isolotto, gathered here in front of God and men, declare to share in all and for all the expressed thought in this our assembly of our priest Don Enzo Mazzi. In front of God and the tribunal of men we intend to assume the moral, civil, and criminal responsibility of all that we have said through the mouth of our Don Enzo.¹⁶⁷

And with that, the faithful of Isolotto exited their church singing *We Shall Overcome*.¹⁶⁸ Behind them, the Curia’s representatives locked the church doors.

5. Conclusion

Since its opening in December 1957, Isolotto’s parish church had been a place of religious innovation and social inclusion. For over a decade, it was where many in the community gathered to celebrate with each other and where they found solace amidst tragedy. It was in the church, during and outside of religious services, where the faithful studied and discussed the Bible, Church documents, and the happenings and results of the Second Vatican Council. But in the autumn and winter of 1968, Isolotto’s church became more than just a space for community members to find strength, comfort, and knowledge. During this period, the church stood as a symbol for many Catholics throughout Italy and the rest of the Catholic world who were working

¹⁶⁷ GR 0407, “Don Mazzi restituisce le chiavi,” *La Nazione Firenze*, January 24, 1969; GR 0408, “All’Isolotto restituite le chiavi della parrocchia,” *Il Lavoro*, January 24, 1969; GR 0411, “Sfrattata dalla Curia la comunità dell’Isolotto,” *L’Unità*, January 25, 1969; GR 0415, “La chiesa dell’Isolotto riconsegnata alla curia,” *L’Avvenire*, January 25, 1969; GR 0416, “Isolotto senza chiesa,” *Il Lavoro*, January 26, 1969; *Isolotto: 1954-1969*, 337-344.

¹⁶⁸ De Vito, Christian G., *Mondo operaio e cristianesimo di base: L’esperienza dell’Isolotto di Firenze* (Rome: Ediesse, 2011), 84.

to reform the structure, focus, and identity of the institutional Church. After Cardinal Florit dismissed Enzo Mazzi as parish priest in early December, Isolotto's church also became a contested space. According to many in Isolotto, the appointment of Curia-approved priests to celebrate the Mass, and the arrival of lay Catholic worshippers from outside the community, represented an attempt by the religious hierarchy to dictate who could gather within the church. Conversely, Florentine ecclesiastical officials viewed the frequent and large assemblies within the church as a threat to not only the social and religious order of the parish, but also that of the larger Florentine archdiocese.

The events between September 22, 1968 and January 22, 1969 represented a transitional phase for the religious community in Isolotto. The faithful loyal to the experiences of the past fifteen years and the priests who had called Isolotto home continued to assemble in the piazza outside the locked church to pray and read from the Bible. They also gathered in the barracks that had served as a meeting point during the fall of 1968 to discuss current events, meet with supporters, and listen to speakers who came from around the world.¹⁶⁹ When Cardinal Florit reopened the church at the end of August, 1969 and appointed a new priest, Isolotto's religious community splintered. While the church symbolized the center of the official parish, the barracks became the new heart of the Christian base community of Isolotto.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Within the historical archive of the Comunità dell'Isolotto exist transcriptions and over one-hundred audio recordings of assemblies held between 1968 and 2005.

¹⁷⁰ According to the its own sources, the birthdate for the base community of Isolotto was December 4, 1968, the day Cardinal Florit removed Enzo Mazzi as parish priest.

Conclusion

After Florentine ecclesiastical officials closed Isolotto's parish church on January 22, 1969, the religious community in the city officially fractured. Many of the faithful in the community continued to gather on Sunday mornings to pray, read religious and non-religious texts, and discuss current issues facing the Church and Italian society. Initially, they assembled on the steps in front of the parish church, and later, after the Curia enforced its right over that property, they met in the piazza in front of the church. On Wednesday evenings, many of these Catholics would also come together in the barracks that had served as a meeting point during the events of the fall the previous year to discuss current events and converse with Catholics from different parts of Italy.¹ During this period, the archdiocese had arranged for celebrations of the Mass to take place in the same small chapel that had served as the religious home of the community for nearly three years before the parish church opened in 1957. Cardinal Florit even visited the chapel in March, an act that did not go unnoticed by those Catholics in Isolotto who had been asking the archbishop to visit the community and talk with them for years. The majority of Catholics in Isolotto did not attend a Mass in the community until July 20, when a Florentine priest from another parish officiated during the assembly in the piazza.²

Before participating in their first celebration of the Mass in eight months, the community drafted and distributed a letter explaining their decision. In the text, the faithful declared that “they suffer due to the absence of the Mass” but that they had “refused to celebrate the Mass

¹ The historical archive of the Comunità dell'Isolotto holds transcriptions and audio recordings for over two hundred of these assemblies between 1968 and 2005 (<http://archivista.comunitaisolotto.org/fonds/428>).

² BA 035, “Documento il Popolo di Dio ai suoi Pastori. Si celebra la messa in piazza,” July 20, 1969 (<http://www.comunitaisolotto.org/Archivio/Assemblee/1969.07.20..pdf>).

together with our priests out of fear that it would become an act of division.” Their “gesture of goodwill,” however, had been ignored by the priests sent to the community by the Curia. After months of inaction, the community finally realized these priests “were not sent to welcome us” but instead to “create another parish that would erase all of the past experiences” of the community. These Catholics had made one last effort to reach out to the new parish priest through other Florentine priests, but even this action was met with indifference to the desires of the faithful and a rejection of a communal experience. Realizing that no hope of collaboration existed, the faithful of Isolotto decided to begin celebrating the Mass with “priests and communities that recognize us as part of the People of God and welcome us as a Christian community.” They declared that the Mass on July 20 would be a “Mass of joy in liberty and love” and that it would be a “Mass of hope that will be celebrated with all Christian brothers.”³ In addition to distributing this letter to Catholics in other parishes throughout Florence, the community also sent the letter to Pope Paul VI and a group of bishops.⁴

After six months of relative peace between the community of Isolotto and the Florentine Curia, the decision to celebrate the Mass and the letter explaining the motivations behind this action incited another round of heated notifications and public letters between the two parties. The Florentine police, at the request of ecclesiastical officials, sent a letter demanding that the community stop celebrating the Mass in the piazza.⁵ After a lawyer, on behalf of the community of faithful in Isolotto, pointed out the unconstitutionality of this order, Archbishop Florit sent a notification prohibiting the celebration of the Mass in the piazza and threatening to suspend any

³ EM Documenti 127, “Lettera della Comunità dell’Isolotto “A tutto il popolo di Dio Ai suoi pastori” nella quale si proclama la ripresa delle messe ed elenco dei vescovi ai quali è stato inviato il document,” July 20, 1969.

⁴ EM Documenti 128, “Lettera al Papa e ai vescovi per accompagnare il document della comunità sulla ripresa della celebrazione della messa,” July 20, 1969.

⁵ EM Documenti 129, “Lettera della Questura di Firenze che diffida l’utilizzo del sacrato della Chiesa e la celebrazione della messa alla Comunità,” July 25, 1969.

priest who served as a celebrant of the Mass.⁶ The community then sent a letter to Florit in response to his notification, in which they claimed that the archbishop's action was "the latest display of a desire to ignore and radically stifle our community through a repressive manipulation of the law." After a lengthy recitation of what the community believed to be slights and abuses enacted by the Curia over the last fifteen years, the letter cited the transformational experience of the Second Vatican Council and declared that Isolotto would continue to be "part of the grand process of renewal that agitates the Church and society." Finally, the community swore to continue to celebrate the Mass in the piazza every Sunday.⁷

Given the bitter history between the Curia and the community of Isolotto, this latest series of exchanges must have worried many Florentine Catholics. However, two remarkable gestures of reconciliation changed this narrative, at least for a few weeks. On August 12, Florit appeared without notice at the residence of Enzo Mazzi, Sergio Gomiti, and Paolo Caciolli. The archbishop, in a letter left with Gomiti, invited the three priests to live with him at the archbishop's palace.⁸ Nearly two weeks later, while participating in the celebration of the Mass in the piazza, the three priests expressed their desire to accept Florit's invitation. Although this decision surprised many Catholics in the community, they nonetheless supported the priests willingness to seek a better relationship with Florit.⁹ This chance at reconciliation however, evaporated on August 31, with an action nearly as dramatic as when the Curia locked the doors of the parish church.

⁶ EM Documenti 130, "Trascrizione ciclostilata di una notificazione del Card. Ermenegildo Florit," July 30, 1969.

⁷ EM Documenti 132, "Di fronte alla notificazione del Card. Florit la Comunità dell'Isolotto per l'Unità e l'autenticità della Chiesa," August 2, 1969. The community also sent a letter to all Italian bishops to which they attached their response to Cardinal Florit (EM Documenti 133, "Lettera della Comunità dell'Isolotto a 'Reverendissimo Padre'," August 4, 1969).

⁸ EM Documenti 139, "Testo del Card. Florit rivolto a d. Gomiti e d. Mazzi," August 12, 1969.

⁹ EM Documenti 144, "Lettera di Enzo Mazzi, Sergio Gomiti, Paolo Caciolli al Card. Ermenegildo Florit sulla visita ricevuta," August 24, 1969.

Late in the evening of August 30, Florit sent notice to Enzo Mazzi that he planned to reopen the church the next day and personally celebrate the Mass. The community quickly drafted a response and sent a representative to attempt to deliver the message to the archbishop. The next day, Sunday, Florit arrived with a large contingent of people, including lay Catholics, most of whom were not workers or people who had to struggle for a living, priests from other parishes, and members of the police. While this group entered the church, several thousand Catholics remained in the piazza outside.¹⁰ The evening of August 31, many community members gathered in the barracks to discuss the reopening of the church and what it meant for them going forward. After a lengthy and heated discussion, Mazzi, Gomiti, and Cacioli decided to rescind their acceptance of Florit's offer to live with him at the archbishop's residence.¹¹ With the opening of Isolotto's church, the Curia-appointed priest and deacons resumed the regular schedule of Masses in the parish. While these new officials expressed an interest in meeting with community members, they rejected the religious, social, and political positions advocated by Mazzi, Gomiti, and Cacioli. They also refused to acknowledge or accept the presence of the faithful who had formed the Christian Base Community (*Comunità cristiane di base*—CdB) of Isolotto on the day that Florit removed Enzo Mazzi as parish priest in December 1968.¹²

¹⁰ BA 039 Mattino, "Florit celebra la messa all'Isolotto, una delegazione da Florit, la Comunità rimane in piazza," August 31, 1969, <http://www.comunitaisolotto.org/Archivio/Assemblee/1969.08.31.m.pdf>.

¹¹ BA 039 Sera, "Riflessioni sul gesto del cardinal e sul future della Comunità," August 31, 1969, <http://www.comunitaisolotto.org/Archivio/Assemblee/1969.08.31.s.pdf> and EM Documenti 146, "Verbale dell'assemblea della Comunità dell'Isolotto," September 1, 1969.

¹² Christian Base Communities are most commonly thought to be located in Latin America, in part due to the influence of Liberation Theology. However, Italy was and is a country with a lively number of base communities. For more on Christian Base Communities, see: Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of Vatican II: Western European Progressive Catholicism in the Long Sixties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 111-163; Mario Campli and Marcello Vigli, *Coltivare speranza. Una chiesa per un altro mondo possibile* (Pescara: Tracce, 2009); Margaret Hebblethwaite, *Base Communities: An Introduction* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1993); Cecilia Loreto Mariz, *Coping with Poverty: Pentecostals and Christian Base Communities in Brazil* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994). For more on the current situation for catholic movements in Italy, see: Massimo Faggioli, "The New Elites of Italian Catholicism: 1968 and the New Catholic Movements," *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. XCVIII, No. 1 (January 2012): 18-40.

While the parish church had symbolized the spiritual and social center of the religious community of Isolotto for nearly fifteen years, the Church piazza and the green barracks on via degli Aceri became the twin hearts of the Christian Base Community in 1969. Members of the CdB continued to participate in the celebration of the Mass in the piazza for nearly thirty years before shifting to the barracks.¹³ Shut out from the official channels of the Florentine Church, the members of the CdB in Isolotto nonetheless continued to live the lessons and experiences of the Second Vatican Council, to advocate for those most in need, and to push for a Church dedicated to following the example of Christ. Since 1969, the relationship between the Catholics that were members of the CdB in Isolotto and ecclesiastical officials in Florence went through a series of rapproachments and silences, especially after Cardinal Florit's retirement in 1977.¹⁴ Yet, complete reconciliation between the two parties has not been achieved. Thus, for nearly fifty years, the Christian Base Community in Isolotto has continued to labor outside the walls of the institutional Church. In partnership with other base communities in Italy and in countries around the world, Catholics in Isolotto have sought to create a better, more compassionate world.

On October 22, 2011, nearly 57 years after he arrived in Isolotto as a young priest, Enzo Mazzi died.¹⁵ After laboring as a priest under six popes, it is unfortunate that he did not live long enough to witness the election of Pope Francis in March 2013. Certainly, it seems likely that the current pope, who has spent his life championing the cause of the poor, opposing consumerism and various elements of capitalism, and emphasizing God's mercy, would be sympathetic to many of the ideas and causes articulated by Mazzi and the faithful of Isolotto throughout the 1950s and 1960s. At the same time, Francis has condemned Marxism, although not Marxists, and

¹³ Mazzi and Gomiti began to celebrate the Mass again in December 1969.

¹⁴ Florit died in December 1985 and is buried in Florence's Basilica of Santa Maria del Fiore.

¹⁵ Ivana Zuliani, "L'Isolotto dice addio a don Mazzi," *Corriere Fiorentino*, October 22, 2011, accessed October 29, 2011, http://corrierefiorentino.corriere.it/firenze/notizie/cronaca/2011/22-ottobre-2011/isolotto-addio-don-enzo-mazzi-fu-simbolo-dissenso-cattolico-1901909616765.shtml?refresh_ce-cp.

positioned many of his views within the Church's traditional social doctrine.¹⁶ Perhaps the closest we can get is to consider what Pope Francis wrote in his 2013 apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* ("The Joy of the Gospel"), which focused on evangelization in the modern world. In the chapter titled "The Church's Missionary Transformation," Francis declared that base communities, along with other movements, "bring a new evangelizing fervor and a new capacity for dialogue with the world whereby the Church is renewed." Yet the pope went on to caution that these communities should not "lose contact with the rich reality of the local parish and to participate readily in the overall pastoral activity of the particular Church."¹⁷ Today, the Catholics who constitute the Christian Base Community in Isolotto embrace opportunities to transcend borders of all kinds, including race, nationalism, religion, political, cultural, psychological, and more. They welcome anyone who wants to "walk down the communal path of gradual liberation."¹⁸

¹⁶ Lizzy Davies, "Pope says he is not a Marxist, but defends criticism of capitalism," *The Guardian*, December 15, 2013, accessed January 15, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/15/pope-francis-defends-criticism-of-capitalism-not-marxist>.

¹⁷ Francis I, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#An_ecclesial_renewal_which_cannot_be_deferred.

¹⁸ "Storia del quartiere e della Comunità," <http://www.comunitaisolotto.org/Storia/Storia.htm>.

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-The following designations in footnotes signify sources from this archive:

- BA (*Bobine audio*—audio recordings)
- GR (*Giornali e riviste*—newspaper and magazine articles)
- EM CICL (*Documenti ciclostilati*—fliers and texts)
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- LT (*Lettere*—letters)
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