

HOLY TONGUES: The Preservation of Classical Languages
by Religious Communities

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Abstract

Latin and Hebrew are often called dead languages, but the fact is that they have endured for centuries without native speakers, in the form of religious ceremonies, prayers, and texts used in Roman Catholicism and Judaism. Their status as *sacred languages* is multifaceted: they are used to designate a moment or book as holy, often as part of a ritual, and in doing so they sometimes take on a perceived divine quality, especially since it is rare for laypeople to understand their words. The mysteriousness of these foreign languages, combined with their connection to God, can imbue Latin and Hebrew with a certain air of sanctity in their own rights, as sort of linguistic relics, and to those who understand them, usually clergy. But perhaps the most noteworthy feature of sacred languages is their role in identity formation for Catholics and Jews who attend services in Latin and Hebrew. Because the languages are closely tied up with a sense of community with Catholics and Jews of previous generations and other nationalities, and because they are a clear marker of difference, separating Catholicism and Judaism from other religions (and even other Catholics and Jews), Latin and Hebrew help to create a sense of identity. This paper aims to explore the ways that this occurs, and what this means for Catholics and Jews who attend services in “their” sacred language.

Introduction

Before I was old enough to read, I could recite the Pater Noster, the Latin version of the Lord's Prayer. Though I had only a vague sense of what the words themselves meant—"debitoribus nostri," which means "our trespasses" sounded to me like "Debbie Tori bus nostril"—I knew that saying the prayer at Mass along with the rest of the congregation was one way of talking to God. And more importantly, I knew that it was something I did because I was Catholic. That was not an entirely accurate belief, though; the majority of Catholics born in the past fifty years have never experienced a Mass in Latin, much less learned Latin prayers by heart. This is because of the Second Vatican Council, a meeting of the Church hierarchy in the early 1960's, which changed the traditional teaching on a number of topics, from relinquishing claims to being the only true religion to allowing members of the laity to touch consecrated Eucharistic hosts.

The most significant alterations affected the liturgy: lay people, not just the priest, could read the weekly portions of Scripture to the congregation during Mass, new hymns were written, the priest said Mass facing the people, rather than with his back to them, and people were no longer required to kneel to receive Communion. Perhaps the biggest change of all was the translation of the Mass into the vernacular. The prayers, readings, and litanies that since the Dark Ages had been said only in Latin, the language of lawyers and scholars and saints, were suddenly said in the languages that people used to speak to their neighbors, their cashiers, their co-workers, and their families. The changes were adapted by the vast majority of Catholic parishes, but there were a few holdouts, groups that considered the new features heretical.

I happened to be raised in one of these parishes, because my father was friends with the pastor, who had decided to start his own congregation after the local bishop suspended him for publicly criticizing certain aspects of the increasing modernity in the Catholic Church. He was determined to have a place to worship in the old ways, with pre-Vatican II values and the pre-Vatican rituals, which is

called the Tridentine Rite, or simply the Latin Mass. I remember playing in the basement of the church when it was still under construction, donating the quarters I got in my Easter eggs to the building fund. I remember the other parishioners: most of them were very old women who would compliment my dresses and slip me a piece of hard candy or a few coins, and whose husbands would tease my dad about needing to buy a shotgun to scare off the boyfriends I would someday be sure to have. The rest were mostly families with an abundance of home-schooled children for me to play with, families who raised their own food to avoid hormones and government surveillance. I remember being told that these were dark days, that Rome had fallen to secularism, and that the normal, healthy family was in terrible danger from “women’s libbers” and gay people.

But in the end, what I remember most frequently, most vividly, and most viscerally is Latin: hearing it, reading it, saying and singing it. I remember the beautiful, mysterious cadences of “Introibo ad altare Dei/ Ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam,” (“I will go to the altar of God, to God, who gladdens my youth”) and the soothing invocation of a long list of saints. For a long time after I disentangled myself from the parish and the traditionalist movement, I felt that something was absent at the Masses I went to in English, and I felt that I had lost not just a pretty language, but an important part of my Catholicism. Even now, years later, I sometimes find myself missing Latin.

How can people become so emotionally attached to a tongue they’ve never spoken in their own lives? What affect does a language have on a religious service, on a faith community, on a worshipper? How does a language come to take on so much significance? And what is it that makes a language sacred? In this paper I will explore these questions, in particular how they apply to Latin and Hebrew in different Catholic and Jewish congregations.

Chapter 1: Sacred Language in Theory and Function

When we think of religion, we may associate any number of images and actions with the concept. For those of us in the West, especially those influenced by the Judeo-Christian tradition, “religion” likely evokes prayer, sermons, magnificent buildings, community gatherings, and a series of laws and moral guidelines. It is somewhat less likely that one would be quick to think of language as a notion closely tied to religion, since most religious books and services today are in the vernacular, the same language used in daily life, rather than a tongue that has been set apart specifically for the needs of religious affairs. Yet for centuries, and even in some settings today, Judaism and Roman Catholicism, two of the greatest cultural forces in Western history, have preserved Hebrew and Latin respectively as sacred languages, used for religious purposes in their philosophical and theological texts, and in their prayer ceremonies, in functions that largely overlapped.

History

The Catholic Mass, (the liturgy, which is celebrated daily and is mandatory on Sundays and Holy Days, in which Scripture is read, hymns are sung, and the priest reenacts the Last Supper of Christ in a ceremony wherein the congregants partake of the Eucharist, wafers of bread and wine that are believed to be the Body and Blood of Jesus) was translated into the vernacular in the early 1960’s, but for more than one thousand years, nearly all of it was in sacred languages— Latin primarily, with one call-and-response prayer, the Kyrie Eleison, in Greek. Though the gospel reading and the sermon, a lesson from the priest exegeting the text or providing moral instruction, would be in the language of the people, most hymns, and all the prayers which praised God, asked forgiveness for the sins of both the community and its individual members, and asked God to be manifest in the Eucharist, were in Latin.

It has been considered the language of the elite of the Catholic hierarchy, limited to those who consecrated their lives to the Church, like bishops, priests, monks, and certain orders of nuns. Though it is true that only the learned members of society would have been taught Latin, it was the language of many historical and philosophical works, so it would be taught in all kinds of schools, both religious

and secular. If one could afford to attend school, from the middle ages until the 1960's it is likely that one would have learned Latin to some degree. Furthermore, many of the lay people owned missals, books with the Latin words of the Mass on one side and the vernacular on the other, allowing them to follow along with the liturgy. More so than the Mass, which was at least familiar, scholarly books and treatises, and even the Bible, would have been inaccessible to the average Catholic for much of Church history, because Latin is also the language of the Catholic Church's non-liturgical documents.

The Vulgate, the official Roman Catholic translation of the Bible, compiled by Saint Jerome in the 4th century, is in Latin, as are medieval theological tracts such as Aquinas' "Summa Theologica," and modern day missives from the Vatican, which is still considered the Church's official language. Papal encyclicals, epistles from the Pope to the populace that address and explain an aspect of Catholic doctrine which he believes must be emphasized, are still written in Latin and referred to, even among the laity, by their opening phrase. For example, even though Pope Benedict XVI's 2005 encyclical on the Christian view of love has been translated from Latin into the seven main vernacular languages of the Church (English, French, German, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, and Spanish) it is titled and widely known among Catholics as "Deus Caritas Est,"¹ because it begins with those words. Pope Benedict is so fluent in Latin, he spoke it for the duration of his speech resigning from the papacy in February 2013, and the reporter who "scooped" the story attributed her success to her skills with the language. The Inquirer News says, "Our Vatican expert Giovanna Chirri was listening to the pope's speech," the ANSA news agency's head of information Luigi Contu told AFP. 'At one point, the pope stopped talking about the consistory. Chirri understood he was saying he was tired, that the pressure was too much, and that he was going to stop,' he said. Chirri rushed to call Vatican spokesman Federico Lombardi to confirm the news but got no reply. In a heated debate with her editor, the journalist

¹ In English, this phrase can be translated in a few different ways, as "God is Love," "Love is God," "God is Charity," or "Charity is God." The most common interpretation is the first, but "God is Charity" is also popular, and all four are equally valid.

insisted her Latin knowledge was sound and they could alert the news.” (Agence France-Presse: 2013) In these ways, Latin has been very much in use in the day-to-day happenings of the Catholic Church and its faithful, in spite of the trend toward vernacularity in recent decades and widespread unfamiliarity with the language.

Hebrew played, and continues to play, a similar role in Judaism. It is the primary traditional language used in the prayers² which are intended to be said daily, and services, which are most frequently attended on holidays, Friday evenings, and Saturday mornings, the Sabbath day. There is some variation in the degree to which different denominations of Judaism utilize translations in their services. While the most Orthodox synagogues use Hebrew exclusively, with perhaps a *drasha*, or sermon, in English or Yiddish, Reform synagogues may be entirely in the vernacular. Reform synagogues are also much more liberal than their Orthodox counterparts, allowing the ordination of women, permitting inter-religious marriages, and emphasizing the importance of having a harmonious relationship between Judaism and modernity. But even in Reform synagogues, there is no denying that Hebrew has some influence, as for example, the names of the congregations are often in transliterated from Hebrew, such as Temple Brith Achim or Emanuel, and children undergoing their bar or bat mitzvah are still expected to learn a small amount of the original biblical text. The Sotah, a tractate of the Talmud, the writings of rabbis from the second century of the common era, details the particular prayers that must be said in Hebrew, and those laws are still respected in Reform synagogue services.

Throughout the approximately sixteen centuries in which Hebrew was only written or spoken as part of liturgies, there was a considerable effort to teach it to young members of the Jewish community, as Cecil Roth says in his essay “Was Hebrew Ever A Dead Language?” Though they may have spoken

² Aramaic, another ancient Semitic language, was the commonly spoken language of the Jewish people during the Second Temple Period. A small number of prayers, most notably the Mourner’s Kaddish, a prayer for the dead that praises God’s glory, are in Aramaic.

Yiddish, Spanish, Ladino, German, Russian, or any number of other languages in their daily lives, children, particularly boys, were instructed in Hebrew by their families and their synagogues from a very early age. Even today, non-Israeli Jewish children often attend Hebrew school to help them become literate in the ancient language, at least until they are able to become adults in the faith via their bat or bar mitzvah. Noam Chomsky says in “Hebrew: The Eternal Language,” that in earlier generations, the education began when the child began to speak his native language, or at the latest, around age three, and that the axiom, “He who does not teach his child the Holy Tongue buries him,” was popular. It should be noted that the pronouns in this saying are all masculine, because although learning Hebrew was not the exclusive domain of the upper class, it was, at certain points in history, limited to males. It was certainly not, then, a normal living language, as half the population were restricted from it. Furthermore, it lacked vocabulary for anything that was not present in the world of the ancient Israelites, and the average Jew would not have been able to converse in Hebrew and would have been limited to reading the holy texts.

There were many such books, because in addition to its use in the liturgy, Hebrew has been used by Jews throughout the centuries to exchange ideas about theology and the study of the Torah, Jewish Scripture and Law. Rabbis and scholars have almost always chosen it as their language for writing midrashim, interpretations of Biblical stories that imaginatively fill in gaps in the original text, legal documents, and kabbalistic papers, which deal with mysticism. Hebrew has also been the language of choice for works of secular Judaism; for example, Roth asserts that many of the Zionist newsletters, which were circulated in the 19th century, were written in Hebrew. Hebrew’s popularity in Jewish writings endured through many generations during which no one spoke it as a native language, and since the creation of the State of Israel, it has undergone an intentional renaissance into a living language.

Like Latin, then, Hebrew has been preserved for centuries in its capacity as a sacred language.

Both of them have served important liturgical functions, though modernity has seen vernacular languages being used in religious services as well. Those who wish to completely immerse themselves in Catholicism or Judaism have been required to study their respective language, whether to become an adult member of the community, a member of the clergy, or a scholar. Based on these uses of Latin and Hebrew, we can determine that sacred languages are used to mark a verbal interaction as special and holy: when circumstances become extraordinary, and the conversation exceeds the limits of the earthly, the language used must also leave the bounds of normal communication. But because the world is full of so many examples of popular religions— including mainstream Catholicism post-1962, and some branches of Judaism— that do not rely on the use of a sacred language, it is natural to wonder why these two religions do have Hebrew and Latin as such important aspects of their historical cultures.

Magic

At first glance, it is tempting to attribute the use of sacred languages to anthropological observations regarding magic and magical spells. Marcel Mauss, a French sociologist and anthropologist, observed in *A General Theory of Magic*, that “Spells are composed in special languages, the language of the gods and spirits or the language of magic... [and] people value archaisms and strange and incomprehensible terms. ... Everything is fixed and becomes precisely determined. Rules and patterns are imposed. Magical formulas are muttered or sung on one note to special rhythms. ... The magician does everything in a rhythmical fashion as in dancing: and ritual rules tell him which hand or finger he should use, which foot he should step forward with. When he sits, stands up, lies down, jumps, shouts, walks in any direction, it is because it is all prescribed.” (1950: 57-58) Latin and Hebrew, in their roles as sacred languages, do meet most of these criteria. Judaism traditionally considered Hebrew the language of the angels, and in the middle ages, God was usually thought to speak Latin, so each can easily be classified as “the language of the gods and spirits or the language of magic.” Further, because each of them is an ancient language, which for the most part

lacked native speakers after the Assyrian conquest and the fall of the Roman Empire, very few laypeople understand the words and their exact meanings, and although they often have some sense of the general sentiments, they seem to derive some higher meaning from the “strange and incomprehensible terms.”

Like magical spells, the Latin and Hebrew words of the liturgies are a way to contact a supernatural power in a unique way, and in fact it is possible that the phrase “hocus pocus” the stereotypical magic spell and a colloquialism that means nonsense comes from “hoc est enim corpus meum,” the Latin words of consecration uttered by the priest at the culmination of the Mass. Though religion has historically tried to distance itself from magic, which has pagan associations, it is easy to draw certain parallels between priests or rabbis and wizards, and between praying and casting spells. After all, prayer is a channel to God, a means of transcending the troubles of daily life to petition for favors, praise the divine, make amends for wrongdoing, and give thanks. Unlike most utterances, which are generally some form of observation or question based on stimuli in the environment, many prayers and liturgies fall into the category of speech acts. Webb Keane explains speech acts as “certain expressions, such as 'I hereby do thee wed,' when spoken under certain conditions, serve not to make statements about things, but to effect changes in a state of affairs, such as transforming two people into husband and wife. ... the specific nature of ritual efficacy is performative, its results being due to a social convention that a certain form constitutes a certain action.” (2004: 433) He gives examples of rituals to bring rain or new seasons, but the weekly and familiar rituals of Catholic Masses and Jewish Torah services also are performative.

It may be surprising to claim that the Torah service is a performative ritual, since unlike a charismatic Christian service, there is no claim of bringing God into the assembly, and unlike liturgies like those performed in religions like Santeria, there is no attempt to bring about particular effects for individual people. However, several of the prayers have the function of creating a community of

worshipping Jews, a community which references itself frequently in prayer. In one particular song, performed by the community weekly, the words “V'shamru v'nei Yisrael et haShabbat,” are repeated over and over again. The meaning in English is “The children of Israel will keep the Sabbath,” and the very fact that the congregation has gathered together, as the children of Israel, and is in that moment observing the commandment to sanctify the Lord's day, fulfills those words as they are spoken.

The liturgy of the Catholic Mass is even more performative, on a very apparent level, as it centers on the moment when Christ is embodied in the sacramental bread and wine of the Eucharist, and then is consumed by the initiated members of the congregation. The words spoken by the priest in the consecration bring about this momentous, mystical experience, and while the ritual is performed with extreme regularity³ it is still treated with a great deal of reverence, and even some uncertainty. The priest at English Masses says to the congregation, “Pray, brethren, that this our sacrifice may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father.” The sacrifice is the same each time, but each time there must be this moment of prayer for the service's acceptability. Then later, in the actual moment of consecration, the priest, quoting Jesus in the Gospels, says, “Take this, all of you, and eat of it. For this is my body, which will be given up for you. ... Take this, all of you, and drink of it. For this is chalice of my blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in memory of me.” By these words, which state that the bread has become Jesus' body and the wine has become his blood, Catholics believe that these substances are literally transformed. The words of the Mass, like those of the Torah service and the words of magic spells that seek to bring about some sort of change in the physical world, are speech acts. Their production is set and established, but it is also creative, bringing about the actualization of an ancient promise, or summoning God into a metaphysical miracle.

Because these liturgies are acts that hope to truly perform feats, there is significant emphasis

³ Every priest must say Mass at least once a day.

placed on correctness of form. After all, there is no room for sloppiness when it comes to these very serious rituals of community and communing, and “the rule governed character of ritual implies that errors in performance can bring dangerous consequences. Tight constraints on interaction imply that the spirits themselves are difficult to reach, and potentially dangerous.” (2004: 435) This gives rise to the question of whether the sacred language is needed as an inherent part of the ritual, and whether its absence constitutes a loss of authenticity.

According to Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall's essay *Language and Identity*, “in the standardization of a ... language ... a single language variety, and the people who speak it, are frequently repositioned as a more central, fundamental, or 'authentic' ... The authentication of identity ... tends to personify the language as much as it imagines a people.” (2004:385) Their examples refer to debates about national identity and ethnic conflict, but the same principles apply in the matters of sacred languages in the liturgy. When Latin and Hebrew are established as the “magical” or at least, powerful and effective languages for worship, communities in the religion that do not choose to use them are generally seen as less authentic. In the course of my research, I often encountered this attitude from Conservative Jews and Traditional Catholics, who regarded the English versions of their services with a measure of suspicion and skepticism.

While some were willing to concede that personal preference was probably a large part of some peoples' decisions to attend services in the vernacular, others saw it as a betrayal and repudiation of the traditions that form the foundations of their religions. Latin and Hebrew emerged as clear symbols of the orthodox, rule-based branches of Catholicism and Judaism, and in most cases, choosing to attend services in the sacred language was correlated with more conservative values and a higher degree of religiosity, that is, more frequent attendance at services, more attendance of weekday services and religious school, and more self-reported praying in daily life. The sacred language was tied to a stronger sense that one's identity as a Jew or Catholic was a central attribute of their life and self-

perception— it was certainly much more than the superficial assumption that it constituted magic.

Language, especially national language, often plays a role in determining one's identity, as Bucholtz and Hall argue in their paper and as has long been known by linguistic anthropologists. The following section addresses the relationship between one's selfhood and the language he or she hears and chooses to speak.

Language and Identity

Imagine being surrounded by people who speak a language you cannot understand. Standing on a busy street corner, or sitting in a murmuring café, hearing conversations without being able to follow them can be a confusing, frightening, and alienating experience. On the other extreme, when one wants to have a private conversation with a friend, without being overheard by others, being able to switch into using a second, shared language can make that conversation a warm, intimate, and effective experience. These hypothetical examples are simplistic demonstrations of one of the core principles of social interactions— that language is one of the key markers of identity.

The construction of identity has two parts, two sides of the same coin: we emphasize our similarities with the other members of a given group (*our* family loves the beach, *our* country values freedom) and our differences from the groups we do not belong to (*we* don't hit people, *we* don't make *our* women cover themselves). As much as people put stock into a sense of belonging, “sameness and difference are not objective states, but phenomenological processes that emerge from social interaction.” (2004: 369) Human beings are constantly constructing themselves in relation to, and opposition with the Other, that is, some alien group who is different in some way(s) that is perceived as significant. Language, one of our most powerful ways of connecting with others, is often a tool for this differentiation between us and them. This is done nearly constantly on the small scale by individuals forming and asserting their own identities, but language use is often a political issue as well, as a form of nation-building.

In our own private lives, we adjust our registers, our use of vulgarity and politeness, and even perhaps which language we use, in order to make others comfortable, impress people in positions of power, and mark ourselves as part of a group.⁴ Relaxing the strictness of our grammar and using new slang may be a way to align ourselves with young people in casual settings, while speaking formally and carefully, at a moderated volume, with an increased use of titles and words like “please,” and “thank you,” can be a method of winning the favor of our elders or potential employers. For many children and grandchildren of immigrants, speaking a different language all together is a common method of connecting with one’s family. Just as immigrant families might preserve holiday customs or particular kinds of food, many people who, for example, leave Mexico or Russia or Germany to come to America will teach their children Spanish or Russian or German. Family conversations may be in English, especially if the children begin to identify more strongly as Americans, but they may also be in the heritage language, or a fusion of the two, like Spanglish. All of these show the ways in which language and identity are often inextricably linked.

Because of the strength of the bond between the language one speaks and one's ethnic or national identity, it is hardly surprising that politicians and rulers have long worked to control the way that their citizens communicate. According to Martin Votruba, Johann Gottfried Herder, a German Enlightenment philosopher, theorized that language is a core aspect of a national identity. In “On Language and Nation,” he wrote, “Is a people ... more fond of anything than the language of its fathers? Its complete wealth of views on tradition, history, religion, and principles of life reside in language, all of the people’s heart and soul. To take away or derogate the language of such a people means to take away all of the people’s eternal assets, what is passed from parent to child.”⁵ Essentially, Herder’s point is that language is one of the most powerful conduits of culture, and that speaking a particular tongue aligns a person with their heritage and ancestry. The strong attachment people have to

4 See “Registers of Language,” by Asif Agha (1998)

5 http://www.pitt.edu/~votruba/ssttopics/slovaklawsonlanguage/Herder_on_Language.pdf

their ancestral language as a marker of their culture is evident in these contemporary debates about identity, assimilation, and ethnic pride. Herder speaks of nations as the bodies that have a language, and in many cases that is true. This has become fairly standard rhetoric, with Peter M. Hill saying in his essay "Language and National Identity," that "Language defines a group: people are X because they speak X" (105)

Think of today's frequent debates in the United States about the importance of immigrants learning and speaking English. In 2006, national media covered a story about a Philly cheesesteak shop, Geno's, whose owner put up a sign that read, "This is America. When ordering speak in English." According to an ABC News article, the owner, Joseph Vento, said that "he was referring to the growing Mexican population," and that, "your loyalty should be to America and America only." In 2010, Tim James, a candidate for governor of Alabama said in a campaign ad, "'We speak English. If you want to live here, learn it.'" Even more recently, Facebook groups with names like, "I'm Sorry, This is America, We Speak English," and "Why Should I Press '1' For English When I Live in America?" have thousands of "likes." Although we may see these attitudes today on the evening news or the Internet and attribute them to contemporary attitudes about immigration, this is far from being simply a modern development.

History is also replete with incidents that demonstrate the power of language as a symbol of culture, especially instances when colonizers have demanded that the people they have colonized abandon their own languages and begin to speak the same tongue as their conquerors. For example, in the late 1800's and early 1900's, the U.S. government ran several boarding schools for Native American children, with the goal of encouraging them to be integrated into White society, or in the words of Charles Mix, Commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, "exterminat[ing] the Indian, but develop[ing] a man." (Smith, 2001:59) One of the areas in which the children were most heavily policed was with regard to their language usage. "Reclaiming Navajo: Language renewal in an

American Indian community school,” by Galena Sells Dick and Teresa McCarty, includes a passage in which Dick relates, “We were forced and pressured to learn English. ... Students were punished and abused for speaking their native language. ... If we were caught speaking Navajo, the matrons gave us chores like scrubbing and waxing the floors or the slapped our hands with rulers. Some students had their mouths ‘washed’ with yellow bar soap.” (1996: 72-73) Smith reports that a student “was punished for speaking his tribal language by having sewing needles pushed through his tongue, ‘a routine punishment for language offenders.’” (2001:62) Largely as a result of these widespread institutional abuses, most Native American languages have suffered a massive loss of speakers, and have had to make considerable efforts in recent years to revitalize their languages.

A similar set of events can be seen in the British Isles where, ever since the British Act of Union was passed in 1536, legal matters throughout the empire had to be in English, not the local languages of Wales, Ireland, or Scotland. People who could not speak English and spoke Welsh or the language of their respective territory were forbidden from holding public office, and were essentially disenfranchised from all matters of government and the law. In combination with the violent oppression of these people by the English over the following centuries, Welsh and the Gaelic languages were nearly lost. Jennifer Quincey says, “Historically, speakers of Welsh were heavily stigmatized by their English rulers, who saw the language as directly causing what they erroneously believed to be Welsh proclivities toward theft, laziness, and promiscuity. ... Currently, the number of Welsh speakers in Wales stands at roughly 500,000 people, or 20.5% of the population.” (2009) However, efforts of the last few decades to restore an independent Welsh identity— and potentially an independent Welsh state— have resulted in an increase in the number of people learning to speak Welsh. In Wales, street signs are in both Welsh and English, and Welsh language classes are a mandatory part of schooling. The 2001 census showed a rise in the number of Welsh speakers for the first time in centuries.

The language that one uses to communicate and express one's self is in some ways a very

personal matter, and can feel close to the heart. This is, to some extent, because of the way that language comes to represent political identity, not necessarily national heritage— as we speak, we prove ourselves to be members of some group, and whether that is showing our competency at working within a system or claiming a place among a disenfranchised population. Judith T. Irvine's work problematizes Herder's tendency to conflate ethnicity, nationality, and language. In "Speech and Language Community," she says that the process of how "languages and linguistic varieties map onto people, activities, and social relations— and how the social constructs may depend on linguistic practice" (2006: 690) is often complex and that speech communities may have nothing to do with political borders. In fact, language community theory can be applied to religious groups as well as nations. But while one's national or ethnic identity is an important aspect of how a person sees herself, it is not the only one. Religion is also incredibly influential in an individual's life, affecting its adherents' opinions regarding morality, human nature, and of course, supernatural matters. Many religions provide a framework for understanding the entirety of the universe, rituals to mark holidays, seasons, and special life milestones, and perhaps most importantly and tangibly, a community to which one can belong. One's nationality may change, one's political views may shift, and even one's family structure may change with deaths, marriages, and births, but one's religion usually continues as a steady foundation over the course of their lifetime. Religious clergy often have the double role of performing services and providing pastoral care, and houses of worship often host social events for people of all different age ranges, and because most religions are passed through families from generation to generation, they can function as an emotional tie to one's ancestors and heritage.

Roman Catholic baptisms, as well as Brit milahs, the ritual circumcision ceremonies that mark a Jewish male infant's entrance into the community, are obvious symbols of the way religion can be interwoven with the major events of a person's life, as are religious weddings and ceremonies that establish one as an adult, like a Confirmation or bar or bat mitzvah. The very fabric of who the person

is becomes laced with the religion and ritual, such that personal milestones and individual philosophies and personality traits become inextricable from their religious upbringing.

Not surprisingly, then, for people who leave their home countries, whether voluntarily or because of oppression, as has often been the case for Catholics and Jews throughout history, religion is often a key source of comfort and an important way to find kinship and camaraderie. In “Faith Makes Us Live: Surviving and Thriving in Haitian Diaspora,” Margarita A. Mooney says, “religious institutions occupy a special mediating position between immigrants and the host society. ... [They are] creating a space where people can fashion their identities and create meaning in their lives.” (2009:35) The familiarity of the religious services, and the sense of shared beliefs and ideals with other community members, provides immigrants with a sense that they are not isolated in their new society. The ways that they marked special occasions, ranging from the sabbath day to their coming of age, can still be celebrated, even if the other circumstances of their life have changed. Perhaps even more importantly, that the matters of conscience and morality that concerned them in their home countries continue to be relevant, and their understanding of the order of the universe still has merit. The power of having a community of people who share one's beliefs can stave off feelings of intimidation and alienation that are likely to arise when one is in a new country, with different customs and few sympathetic or understanding people.

Victor Turner's theory of *communitas* explains much of this phenomenon. He says that in liminal spaces, that is, situations in which people stand on the threshold of two states⁶, frequently experience *communitas* together, a state of feeling that they have risen above any qualities that might divide them. He quotes Martin Buber to say, “this multitude, though it moves towards one goal, yet experiences everywhere a turning to, a dynamic facing of, the others, a flowing from *I* to *Thou*”⁷

⁶ Examples of this include adolescence, which is the threshold of childhood and adulthood, the boundary between waking and sleeping, and the period of time in which one is in the process of joining a club or vocation (e.g. pledging a fraternity, or entering the convent)

⁷ Buber's seminal conceptualization of I and Thou is, at its core, an early assertion of the theory about the Other.

[Communitas] is where community happens.” (1969: 127) His concept of *communitas*, the bonding together of people joined by their intense experiences during a powerful or fraught time can be seen in many situations: boot camp recruits are broken down in order to learn to trust each other, trauma survivors form networks of support, and friendships made during emotionally intense times, such as college or one's teenage years, tend to have a sticking power, at least in memory.

The rituals of Mass and Torah services are liminal spaces, at the halfway point between our earthly experiences and the divine or supernatural world. We do not leave the physical world, but we are expected to set aside our normal concerns and focus on worshipping God. In these moments, we are susceptible to the power of *communitas*, and begin to feel a sense of shared identity and shared goals with our co-worshippers. Since ritual and liminality already have some of this power, a sacred language, which separates the ritual from the mundane and the worshippers from those outside the community, adds an even greater sense of solidarity and teamwork. Latin and Hebrew, languages that one would never hear or speak outside the confines of the church or synagogue, are heard and spoken, enhancing the unusual nature of the space, its positionality on the boundary between the corporeal world and the celestial, and the distinctiveness of the experience that one is sharing with the people around him or her. This creates a sense that the religious community is a speech community as well. Ultimately, Latin and Hebrew are key components of the formation of *communitas*, adding to a sense of liminality and highlighting the bonds between members of the faith.

Conclusion

Sacred languages play an important role in Catholicism and Judaism, for both practical and emotional reasons. They form a speech community for members of a faith who live far apart, without favoring one country's language over another's, and in doing so create a sense of a singular identity that

Essentially, he says that we may experience the world in one of two ways: as interactions between ourselves (I) and separate entities which we do not recognize as like us and may use or dismiss (It's), or as relationships between ourselves and other beings who are also worthy and deserving of respect, with whom we may share common goals (Thous). For further discussion of these concepts, see Martin Buber's *I and Thou*.

overcomes the obstacles presented by time and distance. They preserve an important part of shared history, and while they are changed slightly by the people who use them, they remain set apart from the changing components of progress and modernism. They are thought to be special enough to reach God more effectively than other languages, and they function as a way for humans to perform supernatural deeds. Though they are not necessarily available to all the faithful, they can and should be appreciated for their importance in uniting worshippers with both each other and with God.

More than being used to contact the divine, it is their ability to create a community of worshippers past and present that is the significant. When one hears these ancient languages, they are reminded of their religion's past, the people who came before them and said the same words, and they are reminded of the special nature of the ritual, so completely unlike any other part of their lives. They are joined with the other people in their religious community, who share their core beliefs and experiences living with those ideas, and who are actively engaged with them in the rituals. Their religions are speech communities as well, using the same special language for their shared words and prayers.

Chapter 2: Observations

Origins

My interest in sacred languages stems from my childhood experiences attending Mass in Latin. My father taught me to memorize a few of the prayers, specifically the Confiteor¹, which is the public acknowledgement of sins and request for forgiveness, the Pater Noster², or Lord's Prayer, and the Gloria Patri³, a short affirmation of God's majesty. In high school, I studied classical Latin for four years. The goal of my Latin courses was to teach students like me to read Roman literature like *The Aeneid*, but it also deepened my understanding of the ecclesiastical Latin I had been exposed to. In sophomore year of college I began to study Biblical Hebrew, and was fascinated by both the language, and the realization that, like Latin, it too had endured through millennia because of its religious significance. As I thought about it, I realized that these two were hardly the only examples of the phenomenon— Sanskrit and Arabic have similar roles— but because of my knowledge of these two languages and their respective religions, I decided to focus on them for this project.

Researching the topic of sacred languages was a two-pronged effort for me. The first step was to develop a thorough understanding of the histories of Hebrew in Judaism and Latin in Catholicism, and scholarly theories about the importance of sacred languages. Over the summer of 2012, with a grant from the Swarthmore College Department of Sociology and Anthropology, I did this by reading dozens

1 In Latin: *Confiteor Deo omnipotenti, beatæ Mariæ semper Virgini, beato Michaeli Archangelo, beato Ioanni Baptistæ, sanctis Apostolis Petro et Paulo, omnibus Sanctis, et vobis, fratres: quia peccavi nimis cogitatione, verbo et opere: mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa. Ideo precor beatam Mariam semper Virginem, beatum Michaellem Archangelum, beatum Ioannem Baptistam, sanctos Apostolos Petrum et Paulum, omnes Sanctos, et vos, fratres, orare pro me ad Dominum Deum nostrum. Amen.* In English: I confess to Almighty God, to blessed Mary ever Virgin, to blessed Michael the Archangel, to blessed John the Baptist, to the holy apostles Peter and Paul, to all the saints, and to you, brethren, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts, in my words, and in my deeds: through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault. Therefore, I beg blessed Mary ever Virgin, blessed Michael the Archangel, blessed John the Baptist, the holy apostles Peter and Paul, all the saints, and you, brethren, to pray for me to the Lord our God. Amen.

2 In Latin: *Pater noster, qui es in caelis, sanctificetur nomen tuum. Adveniat regnum tuum. Fiat voluntas tua, sicut in caelo et in terra. Panem nostrum quotidianum da nobis hodie, et dimitte nobis debita nostra sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris. Et ne nos inducas in tentationem, sed libera nos a malo. Amen.* In English: Our Father, who is in heaven, may your name be blessed. May your kingdom come. May your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and free us from our debts as we free our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

3 In Latin: *Gloria Patri, et Filio, et Spiritui Sancto. Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper, et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.* In English: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, and now, and forever, and for ages of ages. Amen.

of books, papal bulls, and journal articles at Yale Divinity School, taking notes and beginning to form my own theories about what exactly was at play in these religions. In the fall, I began the second phase of my research: I began regular participant observation at four local congregations, two Jewish, and two Catholic, and interviews with some of their worshippers, having gained the permission of the rabbis and priests who led them.

There were many benefits of the second phase of my research. For one example, direct participant observation allowed me to fully immerse myself in the experiences of the Masses and services, by saying the same words and watching the same rituals as the other worshippers. I was able to have many conversations with the people who attended these churches and synagogues, and observe them as they interacted with each other, their families, and their leaders, which gave me a better impression of how the communities operated and what sorts of people they attracted. I was also pleased to discover how many people, at all four congregations, were willing to talk to me about my project, offer to give me rides to and from services, and volunteer to be interviewed, even though most of them claimed not to know much about the topic.

On the other hand, the weakness in my methodology was that I was unable to take notes during the ceremonies, because of the nature of worship services, and so I had to rely on my memory after the fact. Additionally, I felt that my methods at St. Ambrose and St. Paul were perhaps a bit flawed. Because I am familiar with the Society of St. Pius X, the radically right-wing fringe movement in Catholicism with which they are associated, and because I know them to be a group that is highly distrustful of outsiders and which the Southern Poverty Law Center has classified as a hate group, I did not fully disclose my own religious beliefs and political opinions. The people I spoke with knew that I was working on my senior thesis, which was about the role of sacred languages, but I did not tell them that I consider myself a conciliar Catholic and have rejected many of their theological views and nearly all their social teachings, especially those regarding Jews, women, and queer people. At times this felt

awkward and dishonest, but it also seemed necessary in order for them to accept my presence.

Somewhat similarly, I was not always certain that congregants at the two synagogues knew that I was not Jewish, especially if I was only exchanging small talk with them, but I would always disclose my identity if the conversation progressed further. In spite of these qualms, I truly believe that my work was sound and that the means by which I researched were fruitful and useful.

Background on Congregations

I attended Friday night services at Congregation Etz Chayim⁴, a Reform synagogue in a major East Coast city, one of the oldest Jewish houses of worship in the country. As a part of the Reform movement of North America, they have a fundamentally liberal approach to theology and practice. The movement has abandoned the idea of a Messiah, does not reject deism or atheism, and accepts both intermarriage with non-Jews and queer identity. As a group, they hold progressive ideas about gender equality, and Congregation Etz Chayim has a female rabbi among their clergy. In their services, Reform Jews may include music played on instruments, seating is mixed between men and women, and, crucially for my project, the proportion of the prayers are said in English rather than Hebrew is much higher than in other branches of Judaism.

On Saturday mornings, I attended services at Congregation B'nai Torah⁵, a suburban Conservative synagogue which describes itself on its website as “egalitarian.” Conservative Judaism is known in most countries outside of the United States as Masorti Judaism, which means “traditional,” because its theology and practice tends to be rooted in tradition. While it is not as conservative as Orthodox Judaism, which asserts that God directly wrote the Bible and enforces the strict behavioral codes formed by centuries of historical custom, it maintains the rabbinic understanding of Jewish identity, which states that only children born to a Jewish mother can be counted as Jews, frowns on

4 Translated: Tree of Life

5 Translated: Children of the Torah (Law or Teaching)

intermarriage, and rejects atheism. In its services, no instruments are used, as they continue to be in mourning for the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the resulting Diaspora. It also uses a very high proportion of Hebrew in its services. B'nai Torah's "egalitarianism" lies in its equal treatment of women, who are allowed to sit side by side with men and read from the Torah in front of the congregation. The status of women varies across the Conservative movement, but it is becoming more equal to the status of men, and women have been admitted to the rabbinate since the 1970's. Hebrew is used in nearly all the prayers, but there are a few exceptions, particularly the Prayer for Our Country and the Prayer for Israel, and the rabbinic sermon is in English.

For my project, it would have been most ideal to observe an Orthodox synagogue— which uses Hebrew exclusively for prayers— in contrast with a Reform congregation, but for practical reasons, this was not possible. As a non-Jew and a woman, I would have most likely been an unwelcome presence in an Orthodox community, and it would have probably been very difficult to find any men willing to be interviewed by me. Orthodox Judaism has extremely strict laws designed to prevent men from being tempted sexually by the women; for example, women must cover their hair, and wear clothing that covers their arms to the elbow, and their legs at least past the knees. They may not sing in the presence of a man, because their voices are considered too erotic, and men may not touch them, even to shake hands, both to avoid lust and because, if the woman is menstruating, touching her would make the man ritually impure. The biggest problem, as far as my research is concerned, is *yichud*, the prohibition against a man and a woman being secluded in a room together. Because I believe it is important that my interviews do not reflect only the experiences of one gender, I decided it was best to seek out congregations where I would be able to freely interact with men and women.

On the Catholic side of my project, I observed 8 a.m. Masses on Sunday mornings at Sacred Heart of Jesus Roman Catholic Church, a large suburban congregation. As a mainstream Catholic church, Masses are held in English, a translation of the Latin rite which was practiced for centuries.

There is a formal set of theological beliefs which Catholics are expected to hold, which are affirmed in the form of a prayer called the Creed midway through the service. Women may not be ordained as priests, and so cannot perform the sacraments, but they are permitted to read from Scripture to the assembly, and they may be Eucharistic Ministers, that is, laypeople who help to distribute the Body and Blood of Christ during Communion. Typically, those who receive Communion will take the host from the Eucharistic Minister in their hands, while standing and then eat it as they walk back to their own seats. The Roman Catholic Church hierarchy, which Sacred Heart follows, tends to be politically conservative on issues related to gay rights and abortion, but is generally liberal about welfare programs and healthcare reform.

Finally, I also attended Sunday Masses at The Church of Saint Ambrose and Saint Paul, a Traditional Catholic church which conducts its services almost entirely in Latin, with the exception of a few hymns. The Traditional Catholic movement rejects the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, a meeting of the Church leadership which increased involvement of the laity in the liturgy, translated all services into vernacular languages, and revoked claims that the Catholic Church is the only true religion and that it should have dominion over political bodies. Traditionalists generally follow very strict gender roles, and have rules about modesty similar to those of Orthodox Jews, including requiring women and girls to cover their heads, usually with a lacy veil called mantilla, when in church. Their Masses, like the Masses of mainstream Catholics, are highly ritualized, following a precise order of events, but the style of the Traditional services, especially the music, is more formal and somber. Only the priest may announce the readings, and only he can touch the consecrated Eucharists— a layperson who wishes to receive Communion must kneel at the railing that divides the altar from the rest of the sanctuary, fold her hands, and open her mouths so that he may put the host directly in her mouth. On social and political issues, the movement generally maintains the opinions the Roman Catholic Church held before the 1960's.

Observation: Etz Chayim

Congregation Etz Chayim meets in an imposing white building in the city center, across the street from a high school, a trendy restaurant, and a Protestant church ironically named Zion. Its architecture looks Mediterranean, and the front, above the doors, has several mosaics of the hands of Jewish priests extended in blessing. Inside, there is a vestibule whose walls are covered with cases full of artifacts related to Judaism: menorahs, Torah scrolls, and even beer steins decorated with caricatures of Jews. On a typical Friday night in early winter, this antechamber is crowded with people, most of whom are gathered by a table with refreshments like fruit, cookies, cheese cubes, small glasses of white wine, and cups of iced tea and lemonade. A middle aged white woman, in tweed slacks and a sweater, is standing at another table, holding flyers for a holiday toy drive, and passing them out as people walk by. The other people are also mostly between 30 and 65, with a sizable minority who appear older. Some of the women wear skirts, and some of them men wear suits, but the majority are dressed like the woman running the toy drive. A Latina woman in a housekeeper's uniform holds a large plastic garbage and leans against a corner. Most of the people milling about are in conversations with two or three other people, and the majority do not say anything to me, though a few quickly say "Gut Shabbos," or "Shabbat Shalom," which means "Good/peaceful Sabbath" in Yiddish and Hebrew respectively.

Through a set of large doors is the sanctuary, which I found staggeringly beautiful the first time I saw it. Its walls are decorated with a geometric design of rhombuses and spirals in blue, gold, green and red, and there are large stained glass windows that seem to have another set of intricate designs, this one incorporating flowers, though it is hard to see them clearly since the sun has gone down and the windows are dark. Overhead, a large skylight is backlit, this one a red and white star. At the front of the room is the *bimah*, an elevated platform, and the wall around it, which also arches over it, is decorated with seals representing the twelve tribes of Israel: Reuben with water, Judah with a lion, Shimeon with a castle, Dan with a snake, Gad with a tent, Naphtali with a gazelle, Joseph with wheat,

Levi with the tablets of the commandments, Benjamin with a wolf, Asher with a palm tree, Issachar with a donkey, and Zebulum with a ship. On the *bimah* itself is the Torah ark, an ornamental closet with two gold doors decorated by squares with blue, green, and red designs. Behind the doors, Torah scrolls are contained, to be taken out later in the service.

A young woman in a knee-length dress and boots, with short curly hair and a *kippah*, the small round head covering known as a yarmulke, skullcap, or beanie, stands at the bottom of the steps to the *bimah* holding a guitar, and two white women and one man, all in suits and *kippot*, stand nearby talking to her. Behind her is a small band, with a drum set and more guitars. A woman in her forties stands halfway down the aisle holding programs for the service and wearing a name tag that says Naomi. When I tell her I'm not a member of the synagogue and ask if there are assigned seats, she smiles and tells me, "You can sit with us!"

"Who's 'us'?" I ask.

"The over-forty singles group," she says. I go and take my seat near the front, in a row of seats that, like at a movie theater, fold down for people to sit in, and then flip back up when no one is in them. Another woman takes a seat on the other side of me and jokes, "I guess I won't be meeting my future husband at services tonight!" As people file in from the vestibule and take seats, a few other women ask Naomi if I am her daughter, but most just say welcome and ask my name and where I am from.

Looking around, though many of the men are wearing *kippot*, several are not, and very few women are. As it seemed in the lobby, most of the congregants are well into adulthood, but in the front row of the far left column of seats, there is a man in his thirties with two small girls in pink and blue dresses, and from the way he and the children wave to the woman with the guitar, it seems that they are her husband and daughters. She begins to play her guitar and sing into a microphone, "Lae lae lae lae lae lae lae..." and the congregants quickly take their seats and settle down, their chatter turning into

singing along and clapping their hands in time with her song. The man in the suit behind her stands up and takes a microphone. “Welcome to Etz Chayim,” he says. He introduces himself and the other rabbi, the cantor, and the third woman as the president of the congregation, then says, “Please take this opportunity to greet the people sitting around you, and introduce yourselves to anyone you don't know.” The other people in the seats around me shake my hand, and I begin to explain my project to Naomi, who gives me her business card so that I can interview her at some point in the future.

The female rabbi comes to the microphone and instructs us to open our *siddurim*, or prayerbooks, to a particular page, and we read through a small number of psalms in English. There is Hebrew in the book, but it is accompanied by both transliteration and a translation into English on the right page.⁶ On the left page, there are several more translations, which seem to be more poetic and interpretive than the ones on the right hand. The rabbi tells us to turn the page, and as the band begins to play, we sing a song in Hebrew, the very popular and traditional *Lekha Dodi*, a song that welcomes the Sabbath. At one point, the whole congregation, singing along and clapping or drumming their fingers on their books, turns to face the door, as if expecting the Sabbath to enter physically, then, after a pause, turns back to face the bimah. As the service progresses, we sing quite a few songs in Hebrew, but read more of them in English. There are prayers for peace, for the recovery of the ill, and in praise of God. Worshippers seem to participate more in the Hebrew songs, whether by joining in or swaying in their seats, but when the prayers are read in English, they shut their eyes, bow their heads, and mouth prayers silently. It is hard to tell if they have these prayers committed to memory, and are reciting them, or if they are praying in their own words. The band is very talented, but the atmosphere during the songs they lead seems, speaking from my experience in very staid Catholic churches, somewhat more like a concert than a prayerful ceremony, and it surprises me to see worshippers all but dancing in the middle of services.

⁶ Because Hebrew is written from right to left, books containing a significant amount of it, especially liturgical books, are printed to reflect this, and open the opposite way of books written in English.

The male rabbi leads a section of the service where he asks congregants to stand up and tell the other worshippers what joyful things they have experienced this week. One man mentions his 35th wedding anniversary, and he and his wife stand up, to applause. A young woman tells the crowd that she has become an aunt. A couple in their late twenties stands and the man announces that “my beautiful and intelligent wife is three months pregnant.” A teenage boy stands to wish his father a happy birthday, and other congregants announce that they have returned from long journeys, that they found themselves interested in going to services again, and that their son will have his bar mitzvah ceremony the following Saturday. The congregation claps for them all.

The Torah scroll is taken out later in the service, and an elderly man reads from it in Hebrew on the bimah. The male rabbi takes the opportunity of the sermon to lecture the congregation on the situation in Israel: that both sides of the Israel-Palestine conflict have been responsible for atrocities, but that Jews must support Israel or run the risk that no one else will. The congregants mostly nod along.

Finally, there is another song in Hebrew, and then we are dismissed. I exchange pleasantries with a few more people as everyone moves out, mostly those who had been sitting around me, but within a few minutes, everyone seems to be in the antechamber near the door, or out on the street walking in different directions.

Observation: B'nai Torah

From the outside, Congregation B'nai Torah is a 1960's brick building, with several entrances, a cornerstone that states the date of its founding according to both Christian and Jewish reckoning, a sizable parking lot, and a playground at the edge of the property. When I arrive, about twenty minutes before 9 a.m Saturday services were due to start, the parking lot is all but empty, and I walk around the building trying to open doors that were still locked. Just as I start to worry that I'm mistaken about the time services begin, a middle aged White man in a white polo shirt and dark dress pants calls out to

me as he parks his car. "Looking to get in?" he says.

"Yeah," I say. He points at a door I haven't tried yet and says, "That's open. It's cold out here!" "Yeah, it is," I say. "Thanks!" I go into the building and find that the door opens onto a long hallway with glass trophy cases and large picture frames on the walls. There is a frame that shows photos of members of the congregation who had served in the military in World War Two, and several cases that contain large elaborate Torah scrolls, with ornate gold or silver handles topped with eagles or embellished knobs. Along the hallway are several small rooms including a library, restrooms, and a coatroom. As I admired the books and scrolls in the cases, another middle-aged White man, with a goatee and a suit comes out of one of the rooms, looks at me in what seems to be an effort to recognize me, and says, "Shabbat shalom." I reply, "Shabbat shalom," and he turns and walks a bit farther down the hall and joins in conversation with a man and a woman who seemed to be a few years older than him. The other man is also wearing a dark suit with a red tie, and the woman wear a tan sweater and a mid-calf length skirt. Both of them are wearing *kippot* in maroon and white, respectively, and they are standing at the door of the main room, where services would be held.

I leave my coat on a hanger in the coatroom and enter the sanctuary at the end of the hall, where the three people I had already seen are now inside. The first man has put on a navy *kippah*, and when I enter the room, each of them greets me with "Shabbat shalom!" and I answer the same way. I take a seat in the back row of the right side, and begin to look carefully around the room. It has a high ceiling, and two columns of pews facing the bimah. The wall behind it has a silver curtain, and above it, the first ten letters of the Hebrew alphabet are displayed in two columns, representing the ten commandments. On either side of this, there are large red stained glass windows at the top on the wall, and purple stained glass windows at the bottom of the wall. Behind the curtain are several more Torah scrolls, but these are kept hidden from view until midway through the service.

The two side walls are lined with large plaques that say at the top, "In Memorial" (the phrase in

Hebrew, לזכר עלאמ, is literally translated “To Remember Forever”) and above that plaque, it says in English “May Their Memory Be For a Blessing.” Each plaque has smaller plates with the names of the dead mounted on them, surrounded by lightbulbs shaped like candle flames. One of the six plaques has the lights lit, and I am told later that that plaque had the names of people who had died during this month in past years. The pews have wooden holders for books on the back, and each pew has several copies of *siddurim*, or prayerbooks, and the Torah, the five books of Moses. Each of these books is primarily the Hebrew text of prayers or Biblical stories, with diacritical marks showing the appropriate vowels⁷. A few parts of the *siddur*, some of the sections of the liturgy that everyone is expected to say aloud, also have a transliteration on the opposite page, so that, for example, instead of seeing just “ברכ אתא אדני, אלוהאינו מלכ העלמ” worshippers would also see something more like, “Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam.” That opposite page also has a loose, non-literal translation of the words into English. To continue this same example, this page would translate the phrase as “Blessed are you, O LORD, our God, the king of the universe.” After I have been sitting there for a few minutes, two of the men who had been standing by the door come over to introduce themselves and tell me that it's New Member Weekend. One asks me if I'm planning to join, and I say I didn't think so. “How do you know when you haven't seen our services yet?” one asks, smiling, seeming to actually expect an answer.

“Well... I'm.... not Jewish,” I say.

“Not yet, you're not” he says, laughing, and the other begins to tell me how so many of the other members “used to be altar boys.”

They go on to ask me where I'm from, what I was studying in college, and if I know the rabbi who teaches Hebrew classes to students at my college, and then one, Alexander, excuses himself to take a seat halfway up the left column of pews. The other, Samuel, tells me he's sitting one row ahead

⁷ Hebrew lacks vowels, and is traditionally written in such a way that one must be familiar with the vocabulary to be able to intuit which word is meant by the chain of consonant letters

of me and that I'm welcome to join him, so I move my things up and settle to his right, two seats into the row. We continue to make small talk in low voices for a few minutes as a few more people, mostly white-haired women in skirts that come past their knees and sweaters or suit jackets, file in and take their seats, apparently randomly.⁸ With the exception of a little girl who looks about 4 years old, all of them, men and women, wear *kippot* and *tallitot*, ceremonial prayer shawls with fringes called *tzitzit*, some of which they produce from their own bags, and some of which came out of a cupboard in the lobby. I didn't see a single person wearing one at Congregation Etz Chayim, but they are a traditional garment for prayer, especially for people who have passed their bar or bat mizvah and are considered adult members of the community.

Samuel tells me about the people coming in, mostly about their husbands (whether or not they are dead) and their children (whether or not they are married, and whether or not it is to anyone significant). He explains that services will start in a few minutes, whether or not there is a *minyan*, a quorum of ten Jewish adults, which is needed to say certain prayers, and he adds that even though *minyanim* are traditionally only made up of men, B'nai Torah believes that women can be part of them and count toward the required ten.

The rabbi, Rabbi Goldenstein, and the cantor, two white men with beards, stand on the bimah, talking. The first man is relatively young, in his mid thirties, and his beard is neat and dark. He wears stylish glasses with thick frames, a well-fitting dark suit with a dark pink tie that matches his *kippah*, and a *tallit* that is practically a cape. Where other people's cover their shoulders across their backs, his covers his entire back, and is joined by a metal pin in the front. The cantor is in his fifties, in a dark *kippah* and navy suit, somewhat baggier than the rabbi's, and his beard is more gray and curlier. His *tallit* has a multi-colored pattern that Samuel calls "his Mexican *tallit*" and is like the rabbi's.

⁸ In later visits, I would find out that everyone took the same seat every week, even when seats closer to the front, where one could presumably hear and see better, are available. When everyone who would come to the service has arrived, almost everyone is sitting on the left side, with the right side populated only by me, Samuel, one older woman in the row ahead of us, one in the row behind us, and a woman aged about 40 with a pre-school aged girl in the back row.

The service begins with the “pre-Torah service prayers,” led by Alexander, standing at a podium in the middle of the aisle that leads to the *bimah*. He reads and chants in Hebrew a series of blessings directed at God, and the congregants add “Amen” at the end of each assertion of God's glory. The cantor then leads a few more prayers, in a deep, booming voice.

I'm confused that he and all the other worshippers pronounce the name of God as Ah-doh-noy, rather than Ah-doh-nai⁹, which is how I've always heard it said both in my Hebrew classes and by other Christians. Samuel explains to me that there are two different groups of Jews, historically: Ashkenazic Jews, from Eastern Europe, Germany to Russia, and Sephardic Jews, from the Middle East and Spain. The majority of Jews at B'nai Torah— and in the United States— are Ashkenazic, and pronounce the words in a traditional, Yiddish-influenced way, that is, Ah-doh-noi for Ah-doh-nai. The Sephardic pronunciation has become standard in modern-day Israel, and American synagogues have mostly shifted to agree with that, but older Jews who were taught to read Torah before the emergence of Modern Hebrew largely retain the Ashkenazic pronunciation.

The cantor truly sings the prayers, much more so than Alexander, I find myself impressed that he can remember all the different tunes, and that the congregation, singing along, knows the music even without written notes in the *siddur*. People continue to come into the sanctuary throughout the half hour that we say these prayers, and when there are finally ten adult Jews, we are able to go back and say the prayers that we had to skip. Samuel points out one of the women, a mid-forties woman named Joy Auerbach, who comes in alone in a purple skirt suit, as someone who “reads the Torah fluently.” She, Alexander, Samuel, and another elderly woman go up to the *bimah* when the Torah service starts, and together with the rabbi and cantor, they open the curtain, and remove one of the seven Torah scrolls.

⁹ God's name, יהוה, is considered so holy that it cannot be said aloud, and in fact, the true pronunciation is now a matter of controversy. In order to avoid saying it, Jews have a variety of other names for God, such as HaShem, (translated: The Name) El Shaddai, (translated: The Almighty God) and most popularly, Adonai, which means Master. Because Hebrew lacks vowels, determining something's exact pronunciation is difficult if not impossible, but certain pronunciations are standard, especially since the emergence of Modern Hebrew as a spoken language.

Singing “Torah, Torah, Torah, Torah, Torah, Torah, Torah,” along with the rest of the worshippers, they carry the scroll, dressed in what looks to be a purple felt covering, around the aisles of the sanctuary. People walk to the ends of their pews to be close as it passes, and the pre-school aged girl yells, “Are we gonna kiss it?!” The adults all smile and laugh, but that is exactly what we do: people either touch their *siddurim* to the Torah as it passes, and then kiss the book, or they touch it with their hand and then kiss their fingers. We also shake hands with the rabbi and cantor, and again say, “Shabbat shalom!”

When they are back on the *bimah*, the woman in the purple suit begins to read from that day's portion, and the older woman reads a short prayer praising God's glory between each verse. When they finish the reading, they sit on chairs on the *bimah*, and the rabbi comes down to the podium to lead a discussion. He points us toward a different story in the Book of Genesis, the story of the rape of Dinah, which is not for several chapters after the reading for the day. “I thought we could talk about this story today,” he says, “Robert, will you read it aloud?”

“In Hebrew?” Robert, a middle-aged man sitting in a back pew asks anxiously.

“English is fine.”

Two semesters before, I had translated this story and written a paper on it for my Hebrew class, so I am interested to hear what insights the rabbi has, and am even more surprised when I find that he truly does mean for us, as a group, to talk about it. He asks for people's responses, and they answer him with their thoughts and ideas about the story. I contribute a thought, pointing out a link to another story in the Bible, and people nod and say, “That's right,” and “Oh, yeah, that's true.” After around half an hour of discussion, the rabbi returns to the *bimah*, and another reading, this one not from the book of Genesis but from the Prophets, is read in Hebrew. Then Torah scroll is dressed again in its cover, and paraded around a second time, just like the first, with kissing and hand-shaking.

At this point in the service, we use English prayers for the first time, more recent additions to the liturgy that pray for peace in our country, in Israel, and in the world. These are read by people sitting in

the congregation, who stand while they read them from the book. Finally, there is a recitation of the Mourner's Kaddish, a prayer in Aramaic that praises God's greatness, and is traditionally said in matters related to death. People stand when saying the Mourner's Kaddish during the first month after a loved one dies, and then on the following anniversaries, when they are considered to be ritually in mourning.

The rabbi then makes some announcements in English— an upcoming movie that will be screened, a blood drive, a Christmas Eve Chinese dinner, and a luncheon to follow the service, hosted by a woman in attendance, in memory of her father. That woman is then invited onto the *bimah* for a glass of grape juice while everyone sings another prayer of thanksgiving. Finally, there is one last song, “Adon Olam,” which means “Master of the Universe,” which is famously adaptable to any tune. With Thanksgiving coming up, the cantor says, we should sing it to the tune of Turkey in the Straw. The service lasts 3 hours, 2 hours more than the Friday night service at Etz Chayim, but people are in no rush to leave, since everyone stays for the luncheon. I assemble a plate of cold cut sandwiches on challah bread and sit with Samuel and some of his friends. They make small talk with me and introduce themselves, and talk amongst themselves, about their children, the weather, and the Israel-Palestine conflict. (They are unequivocally pro-Israel, referring to Palestinians as “those people.”) Another older man, David, an alum of my college, is very interested in my project, asking about different angles I could take and suggesting different resources.

Several cups of tea and conversations later, David insists that I take home some sandwiches and makes me a bag full of them. “So,” Samuel says, “when do you want to convert?”

Observation: Sacred Heart of Jesus Roman Catholic Church

Sacred Heart is a modern building made of light bricks, with a low, sloping roof and large clear windows, and it connects to a parochial school. On the inside, it has many wooden pews with kneelers coming off the back of each, so that people sitting in one pew can kneel on a small cushioned platform that folds out from behind the row ahead. The pews are all facing forward, toward the altar. There is a

podium on the left, and a band on the right with drums and chimes and guitars, whose members all seem to be in their sixties. Between the two, there is a kind of stage, with the altar, a marble table covered by a white cloth, and several large chairs. The back wall is decorated with a colorful and abstract mural, with a large depiction of Christ against several bright colors and random designs and patterns. There is an American flag on the left side of the altar, and a Vatican flag on the other. Behind the podium is a statue of Mary, the Mother of God, and behind the band is a statue of St. Joseph, who was Mary's husband and a kind of foster father to Jesus.

The order of the Mass is fixed and precise, with only the hymns and readings changing from week to week. But because a few of the words to some of the prayers were changed in Advent (late November) of 2011 to better reflect the original Latin, churches stock large laminated cards with the words to the prayers that have been changed. By this point, though, most people have internalized the changes. When the priest says, "May the Lord be with you," it was once customary to reply, "And also with you," but over the past several months, most people have learned to say "And with your spirit," instead, as an example of this.

By the time I get to Sacred Heart, just ten minutes before Mass is set to begin, most of the pews have at least one occupant, if not a whole family, but I claim a seat on the end of one row. The congregants range in age from babies to the very elderly, but there are certain things they have in common: nearly all of them are white, with the exception of an Asian family and two Hispanic families. Unlike at the synagogues, where many people were alone, nearly everyone at Mass at Sacred Heart is there with someone— a spouse, several children, their grandparents, or some combination. The people here are more casually dressed than the people at the synagogues were, too. People wear jeans or track pants, jerseys, t-shirts, sweaters and t-shirts. A few little girls are in frilly dresses, but most people are clearly dressed in the clothes they plan to wear all day, for yard work and television watching.

The priest, named Father Edward, preceded by a three pre-teen girls in white robes carrying candles and a crucifix, processes in as the congregation sings a hymn, led by the band. The song is old and usually sung to a much slower melody, but the music is very uptempo here, almost like a show tune in sound. As for the priest, he seems to be around sixty years old, white, and bald, with a white beard. He wears the priestly vestments: a long white robe called an alb and a kind of scarf called a stole under a chasuble, which is a large, colored, and usually elaborately decorated rectangle of cloth. When he reaches the altar, the girls take seats, and he stands behind the table, and welcomes the congregation. They echo back a “Good morning, Father.” He announces that the Mass is being said in memory of a former congregant, and mentions them by name. Then he proceeds to lead the worshippers in a prayer of repentance, the modern, English Confiteor¹⁰ which is practically a literal translation of the original prayer. The congregation says it aloud together with him, but he says the last line: “May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life,” and they join in for the “Amen.” The next prayers are also translations into English out of Latin, except for one that is translated out of Greek. They ask for God's mercy, praise God, and note that God removes, or is capable of removing, sin from the world.

After this, we begin what is called the Liturgy of the Word, as a middle-aged woman in a rust colored sweater and jeans takes the podium and reads us a short selection from the Hebrew Scriptures. “The Word of the Lord,” she says at the end, and we all say, “Thanks be to God!” She then reads the Responsorial Psalm, a call-and-response prayer in which she tells the other worshippers a phrase, in this case “The Lord will bless the loving heart, God will seek the lost and find them,” and expects them to say it at the end of every verse that she then begins to read. Sometimes the verse is shorter, and that works better; this morning no one can remember quite how it goes. “The Lord will bless the ... the lost and ... them,” we say. Then there is another reading, this one from later in the Bible, one of the epistles

¹⁰ See Footnote 1

that followers of Jesus wrote to each other during the early years of the Church. Next, Father Edward stands up and takes the podium to read to us from the Gospel, the stories of Jesus' life, and the woman returns to her seat. Children squirm and fight with each other, and teenagers lean their elbows on their knees and drop their heads in their hands as we move on to the homily, the lecture the priest gives about the lessons in the Scripture passages of the day. Today, he urges us to be generous in the upcoming holiday season, not just to our family, but to charity drives, telling us about the various programs the church will have accepting donations of food, clothing, and toys. After he finishes, we stand to “profess our faith.” This is the only time that people seem to consult the cards with the new translation, as this prayer, the Nicene Creed¹¹, is very long, and some of the phrases in this translation are very unnatural in English.

The next part of the Mass is called the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and it is in this part of the Mass that the priest consecrates Communion wafers of bread and two cups of wine to make them the Body and Blood of Christ— a metaphysical miracle that Catholics, unlike most Christians, hold to be literal. The prayers that are said are participatory; Father says, for example, “Pray, my brothers and sisters, that this, our sacrifice, may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father,” and we respond, “May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands, for the praise and glory of his name, for our good, and the good of all his Church.”

Everyone recites the Sanctus, a prayer citing God's holiness, which is almost exactly the same as the *Kedushah*, the Jewish prayer said before the opening of the ark. Both were inspired by a biblical

¹¹ I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit, was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man. For our sake, he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

story in which the prophet Isaiah sees a host of angels singing, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord, Heaven and Earth are full of your glory.” Then the priest asks for the congregants to join with him in reciting “the mystery of faith,” a very short recapitulation of the story of Christ's resurrection. There is even more participation during the next two prayers, when worshippers hold hands with each other for the Our Father, and then shake hands as part of the Sign of Peace, a brief period where worshippers turn to each other and wish peace for each other. Though this is an opportunity for the people to talk freely for a moment, it is the priest alone whose words consecrate the bread and wine.

As another song is sung, we fall into lines that process up the aisle toward the altar, where Father Edward and two older women are waiting to distribute Communion. Parents steer their children ahead of them, hands on their shoulders and heads to keep them from running off, and nearly everyone else folds their hands. Once they reach the front of the line, people place one hand over the other, palms up, allow the priest to place the host there, and then, moving again, put it in their mouths. If they take the wine, they also do so standing, and take the cup from the Eucharistic Minister. Several people walk from this line all the way out of the church, once they've received Communion, because technically, one is only obligated to receive the sacrament each week, but it's considered poor form to leave early, and priests often complain about it in the homily or during announcements. Still, the only prayer remaining after Communion is short: the priest instructs us to “bow your heads and pray for God's blessing,” and then dismisses us as we sing a final song. There is a rush to get out of church, though the priest stands by the back door shaking hands, and a few people linger to talk to him. I seize the opportunity to talk to people, introducing myself to a few adults of varying ages. When I mention my project, they raise an eyebrow. “Latin?” several say, “I don't know anything about Latin. We haven't used it in years, you know?” I tell them this is fine, and manage to get a few email addresses. Still, compared to the synagogues, people are less forthcoming and outgoing. It's most likely because I'm among other young people here, whereas almost everyone in the two Jewish congregations was much

older. By that same token, people here are more distracted by taking care of their children than the child-free adults I've already met are. I also probably look more at ease here, not like someone who needs help, but at synagogue, I most likely look a little bit lost.

I leave and start walking back toward home, and nearly get hit by two different cars before I make it even out of the parking lot. The drivers are both old ladies who can't see over the steering wheel, both of whom smile and wave at me as if they don't realize they almost hit me.

Observation: The Church of Saint Ambrose and Saint Paul

Saint Ambrose and Saint Paul is only about 4.5 miles away from my college, but on the course of the walk there, I see that the suburban town in which it's located is much more blue collar than the suburbs of Sacred Heart or Congregation B'nai Torah. The houses are older, less maintained, with plastic lawn ornaments and Halloween decorations still up over a month too late. A block away from the church, two women are standing on the street smoking. They wrinkle their foreheads at my ankle-length skirt as I pass by, but say "Good morning," anyway.

When I make it to the church, I see a few men in suits standing in front, talking in small groups. They range in age from their late teens through old age, but all are white, and all are very neat, with pants creased from ironing and close-cropped hair. A few families are parking minivans on the street, and children get out of the back rows like clowns out of a clown car. One of the groups of men tilt their heads looking at me as I walk toward the door, trying to place me. "Good morning!" I say, and they all say "Morning..." still looking confused.

I go through the double doors to the rear entrance of the church, and find myself in a small stairwell. One side will take me up to the sanctuary, the other will take me into the basement, where children's catechism classes are being taught. I hear a woman talking to a little boy down there, saying, "And can you tell me, 'What lessons do we learn from the sufferings and death of Christ?'"

"We, uh, we learn that sin is... bad and that's why Jesus had to die, and that we have to suffer,

right?" he says.

"Yeah! That's right!" the woman says. "But those are in your own words— can you say it the way the catechism tells it?" The boy repeats himself, and finally the teacher has him repeat after her, "From the sufferings and death of Christ we learn the great evil of sin, the hatred God bears to it, and the necessity of satisfying for it."

In the corner of the little antechamber I'm standing in, there is a small table with a basket on it, and inside the basket are mantilla and bobby pins so that women can cover their heads. I've come prepared with my own, but anyone who hadn't would not be able to use ignorance of the law as an excuse. There is a sign by the door of the chapel, written in calligraphy: "Out of respect for Our Lord and for the edification of our neighbor, we beg all to appear in Church modestly dressed. For men, the norms of modesty are not met by jeans, open shirts, or tennis shoes. For women, they are not met by miniskirts, sheer blouses, slacks, or sleeveless and low cut dresses. Women are further requested to cover their heads in church. Your cooperation is evidence of your love for Our Lord in The Blessed Sacrament, and respect for the House of God."

Inside the church, there is a large organ at the back, with a man sitting behind it and several women, young men, and many little girls and boys sitting in front of it as the choir. On the right hand side there is a confessional, two small inlets in the wall with a grate between them, and a curtain separating each from the sanctuary, one for the priest and one for the worshipper. The lay person goes inside and lists their sins, in order that the priest can call on God to forgive them. The line for the confessional is very long, at least 6 or 7 people, most of them females ranging in age from 8 year old girls to women in their 60s or 70s. They all have their heads covered with lacy mantillas, many of them are wearing dresses that look homemade, and they are all folding their hands and angling themselves to face the altar, even though it means walking almost backwards to the confessional.

The church is fairly crowded, with families in almost every row of pews, though I find one near

the front that's empty. There are small saint statues running along the outside aisles, perched on window sills, and in each pew is a small paperback missal and a larger hymnal. The missal has explicit explanations of the Mass, every word listed, sometimes accompanied by a drawing of the priest in his position at the altar at the point in the Mass that it's depicting, so that anyone will be able to figure out where they are in the service.

On the altar are a few chairs, and an elaborately carved altar table, with a back wall coming off of it with niches for candles and one for the tabernacle, the golden box where the materials for Communion are kept. Where the Sacred Heart table was in the middle of the platform, so that the priest could stand behind it and face the congregation, here the altar is all the way against the back wall, so the priest will say Mass with his back to the people. As with Sacred Heart, this altar too has the flags of the United States and the Vatican. On top of the altar table are a crucifix, a statue of St. Ambrose and St. Paul, and several reliquaries, which hold small relics of different saints, though it's impossible to tell which saints without seeing the label on them, which one can't do from the seats.

About 20 minutes before Mass is to begin, a man leads us in the Rosary, and everyone except the very elderly kneel throughout it, following along on their own rosary beads. The man says the first part of every prayer, for example “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of the thy womb, Jesus,” and then everyone else finishes it, “Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.”

About 5 minutes after it ends, a bell near the back of the church is rung twice, and everyone stands as the organ begins to play. The priest processes in, preceded by no fewer than 8 altar boys, ranging in age from about 7— they look younger, but they must have made their first Communion, which requires them to be 7 years old— to around 25. They all carry candles, except for one with a crucifix and one with an incense burner. As the priest walks by them, everyone bows to him, a display of humility that I do not remember from my childhood in a church like this, and one that I find myself

very uncomfortable with.

The choir begins to sing the words of the liturgy, with the men singing the priest's part, which I assume he is saying as well, though it's hard to tell since his back is to me, and then all of them singing the response. They do this throughout the psalm that is sung while the priest sprinkles the congregants with holy water, a psalm which begs God to wash the worshipper of impurities and bring him salvation, and they continue through the beginning of the Mass itself. There is another psalm sung, asking for God to judge the singer with mercy, and then we have the Confiteor. The people who aren't in the choir join in singing when the choir is not singing the priest's part, and they all seem to follow along in their missals, whether it's the one from the back of the pew, or, more commonly, one they brought from home. The personal missals look much nicer than the free ones, with gilt edges, the readings for each Mass instead of a general example reading, and ribbon book markers. I used to have one, which I got when I begged for one for my First Communion. I was a little young for one, people said, but I treasured it.

As the Mass progresses, with the same prayers as at Sacred Heart, but sung and in Latin, I am struck by how much incense is being used, so much that I'm not exaggerating or hyperbolizing when I say the altar platform is clouded by it. The altar boy with the incense burner must show respect to the holy text on the altar, to the priest, and to the the congregation by incensing all of them, at several different points in the Mass. The air is thick and sweet. This Mass is also more athletic, so to speak, than at Sacred Heart. While at the English Mass people are expected to sit for more of it, only kneeling at consecration, and standing for the reading of the Gospel and a few prayers, and the priest generally tells the worshippers, "Please rise," or "Be seated," here we change position after nearly every prayer, going from standing to kneeling to sitting and back again multiple times.

People seem engaged during the parts where they can join in singing, but during the readings in Latin, there are more fussing small children and more people who seem to be fighting off sleep. The

sermon perks most people back up, when the priest, Father Lessinger, a younger man in his later thirties, delivers a talk on the apocalypse, how no one will be able to predict it, and how it is nothing to fear if we try to be prepared spiritually at all times. When the time comes for Communion, we form two lines and make our way toward the altar, stopping and kneeling along the altar rail, which has a white cover over it. We are expected to put our folded hands under the cover, a way to avoid touching any tiny crumb of the Eucharist that could be dropped, and a sign of our humility and powerlessness. Then we all open our mouths, some people sticking out their tongues more than others, and allow the priest to come to us, accompanied by an altar boy holding a small plate under the chins of the worshippers, which is another way to avoid dropping crumbs. The priest places the host in our mouths, and then we stand up and return to our seats, silently, not saying “Amen,” as they do at the Mass in the vernacular.

This Mass lasts about an hour and a half, double the length of the Mass at Sacred Heart, and near the end of the Mass people seem to be losing steam, looking more out the window than at their missals, and chasing their little boys around. I am struck by how well behaved the little girls seem to be, and wonder if that has anything to do with the fact that even the toddlers have their heads covered and must be trying to keep the covering from falling off, to avoid getting in trouble.

After Mass ends, the priest tells us there is a bake sale in the basement, being run by the Eucharistic Crusaders. I start to laugh at the juxtaposition of “Crusade” and “bake sale,” but he isn't kidding—evidently, the Eucharistic Crusaders is a club for the church's children. People linger in their seats for a few minutes after the service ends, saying their own private prayers, and some light candles at under a statue of St. Anthony or St. Joseph. Slowly, though, they start to head for the basement. As I begin to walk out of the sanctuary and into the antechamber, I hear someone say my name. I turn around to see the mother of one of my childhood playmates, a Mrs. Kindermann, who bursts into tears when I greet her. “You're all grown up!” she says, “I saw you three days after you were born and I

watched you grow up and I haven't seen you in so many years!"

I left the church in high school, and my family left with me. It was a time of turmoil for our parish, and my parents and the Kindermanns had parted on bad terms. None of that seemed to matter to her, though, and she hugged me and asked me all about my life. I told her about college, about my family, about how I hadn't known there was a Traditional Mass near school until recently, and a little bit about my project. She gives me gossip about her family and our old church, but confesses that she hasn't been there in almost as long as I have, and that they drive two hours each way to get to St. Ambrose and St. Paul. As she introduces me around to other people in the basement, I am glad to have someone to ease my way into the community for me, but begin to worry how it will affect her when my project ends and I stop coming to the Traditional Mass again.

One of the people that I spoke with, a middle-aged man with ten children who directs the choir, asked about my research and tells me he is interested in anthropology too. "What are you gonna say about us?" he says with a smile. "That we're all, uh, a bunch of bigots? And um, dinosaurs stuck in the past?" He laughs, but it's clear that there's an element of testing me here. I smile and tell him as politely as I can that that isn't at all what my research is about, and that I'm focused more on language use than cultural change. I wonder if I will be faced with hostility from these parishioners, but in fact more people from St. Ambrose and St. Paul volunteer to be interviewed by me than people from any other congregation.

Chapter 3: Interviews

This chapter deals with the specific individuals whom I interviewed, and the information they offered me regarding their religious experiences and their understanding of sacred language and its role in Catholicism or Judaism.

St. Ambrose and St. Paul

Stella Matutina, an accountant in her early 60's, the mother of four children. She has been in the Traditional movement since age 15, when her then-boyfriend (whom she later married) read “The Great Sacrilege,” by Father James Wathen, a book which criticized the influence of modernism in the Catholic Church. The youngest of her four children attended boarding school run by the Society of St. Pius X, and she takes an active role in the parish, picking up the mail weekly and ensuring that the bills are paid, despite living over an hour away.

Cassandra Nobles, a graduate student in a music program at an Ivy League university. She was raised going to a mainstream Catholic church, but in late high school, her parents decided to attend a SSPX church. She described the initial transition period as confusing, but eventually latched onto the movement entirely; for example, she now only wears skirts or dresses in public and says a woman wearing pants “isn't *evil*, or even necessarily immodest, but it's not as respectable— skirts and dresses show an underlying concern for propriety.” She said being able to access an SSPX chapel was an important factor in her grad school application process.

Joseph and Teresa Kendermann, a married couple in their late fifties. Joseph is a retired police officer, Teresa is a veterinarian who has home schooled their three children, including their teenage son who is still living at home. Their two older children attended a 2 year SSPX college and are now finishing their degrees. Both were raised in Catholic homes during the years before and after Vatican II, and described being “frightened” by the coming of the changes. Both spent their young adulthoods regularly attending mainstream Catholic churches, but Joseph called the time “spiritually bankrupt” and

Teresa said she was lost morally. They were introduced by their pastor, who was at the time conciliar but followed Orthodox methods but was later suspended by the diocese and started his own schismatic parish. After they married, they followed the priest who introduced them and never attended the English Mass again, nor allowed their children to be exposed to it. “We consider it an insult to God,” said Joseph.

Father Jonathan Lessinger, a thirty year old priest originally from Ohio. His family belonged to a mainstream Catholic church during his early childhood in the 1980's, where he said, “I was never impressed by the priests there, though they were surely decent men.” When he was about 9 years old, his mother became concerned about the liberalism and ecumenism in the church, especially the guitar Masses and Communion in the hand, and the family began going to Traditional Latin Masses at an independent parish. He and his siblings were then home-schooled by their mother until they finished high school. He attended one year of college at the same SSPX college attended by the Kendermann children, and then transferred to the seminary. He claims that the English Mass is “a fiction.”

Congregation B'nai Torah

Jane Schoping, a twenty one year old college student studying Biology and Education, who immigrated to the United States from the Ukraine as a young child. Her parents and grandparents were not allowed to practice Judaism in the Soviet Union, but she attended a Conservative Jewish day school from kindergarten through the end of high school. “I used to call myself Jew-ish,” she said, “but in high school it became really important to me. Now it's one of the first things I would mention, describing myself.” Jane teaches Sunday school to children at B'nai Torah and is active in her college's Jewish student group, but says she usually doesn't really believe in God and rarely prays. Though she has “issues, politically” with Israel, she said she would be willing to move there someday and is “suspicious that basically the U.S. today is like 1930's Germany.” Jane has been to a few services at Reform and Reconstructionist synagogues and found them inauthentic. “It was all in English and they

were like, trying to be Christian,” she said.

Joy Auerbach, a late forties librarian and mother of two teenage daughters, is a teacher at the local high school and a member of the Board at B'nai Torah, where she reads to the congregation from the Torah almost every Saturday morning. Her husband is a convert to Judaism, or as she calls it, “Jewish by choice.” Part of her reason for attending B'nai Torah was the fact that it was welcoming toward her husband, and also allowed her, as a woman, to read from the Torah on the bimah. She was raised in Conservative Jewish household, where her parents went to service every Saturday morning and expected their children to do so as well until their teens. They kept kosher in and out of the home and had Shabbat dinner every Friday night, and even forbade her and her brothers from going out on Friday nights. She has preserved some of these traditions with her own family, but her daughters are in the marching band, which performs on Friday nights in football season. When they aren't in season, her family has Shabbat dinner together, though the girls may go out later, and when they are, they at least have the blessings of wine, bread, and candles before the games.

Rabbi Daniel Goldstein, the rabbi at B'nai Torah, is in his mid-thirties and the married father of one child. His father was a rabbi as well, and while his family is American, he was primarily raised overseas in Scandinavia, and his family also lived in Israel for a year when he was a child, where his mother became involved with the feminist group “The Women at The Wall,” which protests— often in the face of violence— the Orthodox bans against women praying at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. That experience, he says, made him committed to gender egalitarianism, one of the principles of the Conservative movement.

Sacred Heart of Jesus

Natalie Nilan, a 76 year old retired widow, mother, and grandmother, is a parishioner and Eucharistic Minister⁸ at Sacred Heart of Jesus Roman Catholic Church. A lifelong Catholic, she never misses

⁸ A lay person who is able to distribute the consecrated Host and wine to other parishioners during Mass.

Sunday Mass and has been active in her home parishes over the years, as a member of women's groups, rosary prayer circles, and later as a Eucharistic Minister. She and her husband raised their children Catholic as well, and all three of them and all their children, continue to practice the faith, though they go to public school and include secular traditions in their holidays. She says she found the changes of Vatican II “surprising and confusing; things were a little all over the place at first,” but has since been very happy with them. “It's easier for everyone, people get to take part in the Mass.”

Anthony Kepner, a twenty four year old paralegal attends Mass at Sacred Heart most Sundays. Another “cradle Catholic,” he went to Catholic school through 8th grade, and then attended a Catholic university after public high school. An altar server as a child, Anthony said he did not always go to church regularly during late high school and college, but he now goes to Mass most weeks, and keeps a St. Christopher medal in his car. He has never been to a Latin Mass or studied Latin, and was surprised to find out that some churches still say it today.

Father Edward Groven, a priest in his late sixties, is the pastor at Sacred Heart. He grew up in the local area in a large Catholic and says he always knew he wanted to be a priest. He decided to attend seminary in the midst of the changes of the Second Vatican Council, after graduating from college. “Sometimes the things we did to try to reach out to people in the sixties and seventies, we went too far,” he said. “But the pendulum swung back a little, and now we've reached a good place. You need to meet people where they are.” He was somewhat aware that people still say the Tridentine Mass, but he has never learned to say it, and said that while he studied Latin in seminary, he has not had to use it in years and did not remember much.

Congregation Etz Chayim

Arielle Schulman, a twenty two year old college student studying Business and Psychology. Her mother is a rabbi at her home synagogue, and her three older siblings are “way more Jewish than I am.” She was, obviously, raised in a practicing Jewish home, though she attended public school. In high school

she, like her older siblings before her, went on a trip abroad, to various sites in Europe, most of them related to the Holocaust, and finally Israel. “All my siblings came back really religious after that. My brothers, they've never taken the yarmulkes off their heads since. But me, it was like, I don't know, at the Treblinka memorial they had over a thousand stones for all the villages and towns that people came from to be executed there, and I started crying. One of the rabbis was trying to comfort me and told me it was God's plan, and I think that's when I stopped believing in God.” In college, Arielle struggled to find a place for worship, as the Jewish student group was very Orthodox and only male students attended the services. She was introduced to Etz Chayim by a co-worker and said she found the service fun and the people welcoming.

Rabbi Caleb Halevi, one of the assistant rabbis at Etz Chayim, is in his early thirties, recently married, with no children. During our interview, he broke out a ukelele to play me some of the songs he plays during the “tot Shabbat” (Friday night services for children under age 10) which he instituted at Etz Chayim. His family sporadically attended a Conservative synagogue for much of his childhood, but disagreed with many of its social positions, and changed over to the Reform movement. He attended a university with a large Jewish population and active student groups, and decided to become a rabbi a few years later, after some time spent in Israel. Etz Chayim is the first congregation he has been employed by.

Themes from St. Ambrose and St Paul, and B'nai Torah

I was surprised to find in my interviews that none of the lay people I spoke to had been learned Latin or Hebrew well enough to translate it independently, and often did not know it well enough even to understand the prayers they say each week. The children of the Kendermanns did study Latin at a Traditional Catholic college, but only for two semesters, and Joy said that in her childhood, Hebrew school taught her the grammar and how to read and translate, but she had not retained these skills. But this lack of literal fluency or proficiency in the languages did not mean that they were not highly

regarded by those who attend Traditional or Conservative services. Many of them described Latin or Hebrew as “beautiful,” “majestic,” “mysterious,” or “reassuring.” Father Lessinger, who has studied ecclesiastical Latin independently and in seminary, added that, “Latin will always be a point of reference, and a historic root. It will always be a liturgical language, and no amount of exploration will make it irrelevant.” But the main points that emerged were three-fold: that the sacred language's role through the centuries makes it important and helps preserve a sense of continuity and unity with those who came before, that it unites Catholics and Jews from different countries, and that it is an essential element of a proper and orthodox prayer service or Mass.

Tradition

One of the features of a sacred language that is most often mentioned by Traditional Catholics and Conservative Jews is its timelessness. Though outsiders might see Latin and Hebrew as dated and irrelevant, fossils of ancient times, members of these groups consider the centuries in which they were used only for religious purposes as equally vital periods. For them, Latin and Hebrew never “died” at all. “One of the things I like best about Hebrew is just the thought of all the people who were using it and saying these same prayers for centuries and centuries,” Jane said, and this was echoed by Rabbi Goldstein, who called it the language of our ancestors. Joseph Kendermann had a similar experience with Latin, saying that he found it “completely awe-inspiring that at the Mass, you're saying the same words that they said in the Middle Ages, and even going back to Christ,”⁹ and Cassandra Nobles said, “The Latin makes it a lot easier to really realize that you're in the footsteps of the saints.”

This is in line with the theory that a sacred language provides a certain sense of communal identity. Geertz's explanation of symbols as “a system of inherited conceptions ... by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life”

⁹ This is not strictly accurate; the Tridentine form of the Mass, which is the one Traditional Catholics attend today, was codified in 1570. The words of the consecration are taken from the Gospels' description of the the Last Supper, but the other aspects of the Mass did not necessarily start with the earliest church. Further, Jesus and his contemporaries would have most likely spoken Aramaic, and the Gospels were originally written in Koine Greek.

illuminates this, assuming that we understand Hebrew and Latin, in their capacities as sacred languages, as symbols that people can use to represent their religion as a whole. More than that, though, using the language calls to mind one's spiritual ancestors— and usually one's genetic ancestors as well, especially in the case of Judaism— who held the same beliefs, battled the same temptations, and crucially, spoke the same words. The language, and specifically the carefully-worded, highly-ritualized prayers that the language is used to express becomes closely identified with the religion itself, both as a belief system and as a historical entity.

This seems to help ground the religion in a sense of tangible, palpable reality. While there is certainly a mystical aspect to using sacred languages— it is an obvious separation from daily life and normal conversation, and the lack of understanding can make the experience “more transcendent,” as Stella said— it also links the sacred language with the real people who came before today's worshippers. There is a Talmudic tradition that Hebrew is the language spoken by the angels, and Latin was believed to be God's language throughout the Middle Ages, but there is much more to them than that. They are also part of a very this-worldly tradition: the languages carry the unadulterated content of the prayers and allow modern Catholics and Jews to feel that they are interacting with Jews and Catholics from earlier generations, as parts of a truly unified group.

International nature

Another frequently noted feature was the fact that a sacred language allows for easy participation in one's religious services even when one is away from his or her home country. Stella told the story of her mother, whose husband's job required that the family relocate frequently, in one case spending several years living in Germany. “She never really learned to speak German, and I think she felt very isolated and kind of on her own, raising three very young children. But she went to Mass every day and once she would step into that church, she was at home, you know, it was the same language and the same words she would have heard in the church she grew up in, or the church we

went to when we moved back.” Joseph noted that he had considered joining the military, and that the Latin would have been a common thread at any church he would have attended. “No matter where I might have been stationed, you know, in Italy or France or Germany or anywhere, if I walked into Mass, I would know exactly what to say and what to do.” Jane mentioned this in her description of Hebrew's importance as well, saying, “It really makes you feel like, you know, anywhere you might end up being, whatever country I might have to go to, I'm going to have these words and these prayers and it's going to be the same service.” Rabbi Goldstein, who did live in several different countries in his childhood, was able to speak from personal experience that knowing the Hebrew words created a comfortable bridge from one country to another.

This is an extension of the sense of unity across generations mentioned in the preceding section. The sacred language transcends national borders and makes those who use it part of a single, cooperative body. Whether by diaspora or by colonization, both Judaism and Catholicism have spread across much of the globe. This could have easily cost them their sense of identity and led to a diffusion of beliefs and endless schismatizing, and while it is true that both Judaism and Christianity have developed different sects and denominations, both retained some core identity, with the Roman Catholic Church in particular asserting its oneness.¹⁰ A sacred language, one which only the elite learn to any degree of fluency, allows communication on theological issues between people from many different nations, and the correspondence between various philosophers and theologians from Judaism and Catholicism has been enormously influential. But again, even more importantly the languages serve as a symbolic tie. Catholics and Jews would have known that their brothers and sisters in faith, even those in other nations, shared a way of speaking. Since language is such a powerful marker of national identity, it is reasonable that knowing they share Latin or Hebrew would psychologically bond them with other Catholics and Jews. Whether this is a way of building a sense of community with

¹⁰ In the Nicene Creed, a statements of core theological beliefs which is recited by the congregation during each Mass, it is said, “I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.”

strangers or feeling at home far away from familiar comforts, having a sacred language seems to have been a powerful method of establishing connections within each faith.

Orthodoxy

A third highly popular reason mentioned by Traditional Catholics and Conservative Jews was a concern for Orthodoxy. The Latin and Hebrew were a part of the traditional and correct liturgy, but they were also a kind of synecdoche for a fully acceptable and proper ritual. Cassandra said that when her family still attended a mainstream Catholic church they “were aware of many abuses to the sacrament— we would always kneel for Communion and people would give us strange looks ... priests would say things that were non-doctrinal and just wrong¹¹ ... we were always leaving Mass angry.” Teresa also talked about being horrified by the changes in the church after the Second Vatican Council, claiming that priests were excusing serious sins, that people seemed to embrace a sense of moral relativism, and that “in just two generations, practically the whole faith was lost.”

Jane and Joy seemed less concerned with the faith of Judaism as an entity than the Traditional Catholics were about the Church, but they too felt something missing in Reform services. Both clarified that they had only been to very few services at Reform synagogues, but Jane said, “I went, and I was like, 'What the fuck is this? This shit is in English!' Like, it doesn't feel like the prayers, it doesn't feel like Judaism in English.” She noted that at a bat mitzvah ceremony at a Reform synagogue, the girl was wearing a white choir robe like a Christian being confirmed. Joy said, “To me, Reform services just feel like church. There's nothing wrong with it, but it's just not as... I don't know exactly the word I want, but having services in Hebrew just feels inherently Jewish to me. And I think you really lose that when you take away the Hebrew.”

It seems that people who regularly attend services in sacred languages do recognize Latin or

¹¹ When asked for examples, Cassandra was unable to remember any specific cases, but other Traditionalists had many horror stories. Joseph Kendermann claimed that a priest had excused masturbation as “harmless” during a sermon, and Stella told me at length about the immodesty allowed by women at Mass, including female altar servers.

Hebrew as being intrinsically bound up with the essence of their religious faith. Though Joy said, “It’s really all about what you’re comfortable with, what you grew up with or came to like,” and Stella offered that a Mass that followed Traditional protocol but was in English, “would probably still be valid,” it is clear that they do strongly value the language, which seems to bear the responsibility of carrying the soul of the religion. When they attend services in English, they are obviously find themselves missing something crucial. To some extent, this is probably linked with the other differences between the separate strains of Judaism and the conciliar Catholic Church versus the Traditional movement, but Hebrew and Latin were specifically mentioned as core components of the service that are necessary and beneficial.

Etz Chayim and Sacred Heart of Jesus

In contrast to the Traditional Catholics and Conservative Jews, most Reform Jews and mainstream Catholics seemed to not have put much thought into what they found in the language of their service. Especially for the Catholics, attending services in English seemed to be the default, not particularly requiring interrogation. Accordingly, the two main themes of their interviews were the benefits of being able to understand the words of the prayers and thereby participate more fully, and the fact that they did not see any particular need for a sacred language and were getting along fine without one.

Understandable

Rabbi Caleb Halevi was eager to point out the value of Hebrew historically, and said, “There’s a Terry Pratchett quote from one of his books about the witches... It’s something like ‘It ain’t religion unless somebody’s saying words you don’t understand.’” But he said that most of the people attending services at Etz Chayim were “hoping to find a service that speak a little more to something they really know about, something that’s relevant to them and not just saying the prayers in a kind of rote way because they’re written out for you.” Natalie said similarly that before the changes of Vatican II, people

were closed off from the Mass, watching while the priest performed the entire ritual with his back to the people, speaking a language they did not understand. “Making it in English and letting us talk and take part, it's all different sides of the same coin. It's so much easier for the people to be getting something out of Mass, not just sitting through it.” Arielle's experience as a Reform Jew in college mirrored this. Since the Jewish student group at her university was comprised primarily of Orthodox and Conservative young men, she found herself excluded from service because of her theological opinions, her sex, and her lack of familiarity with Hebrew. The Reform services at Etz Chayim were more open to her.

Father Edward, the pastor of Sacred Heart, was adamant about the importance of having Mass in the vernacular. “It's very, very old, I mean, this is the early Church kind of thing, to have it in the language you speak, in your community, with participation from all the worshippers. Jesus doesn't want to overwhelm you or confuse you, that's not Christ-like, having one person in front saying things no one can understand or join in with.”

When a service is held in English, or another language spoken by the people, it presents a very different approach to the divine. There is less of an aura of mystery and majesty, and instead the emphasis seems to be on personal spirituality. In Catholicism this is especially true, as the same era of changes that brought about Masses in the vernacular also permitted the increased role of lay people in the liturgy. Natalie compared the Latin and English Masses by saying, “Of course the Old Mass was very beautiful, but you were just sitting there. The priest was up away from everybody, with his back to you, and you didn't do anything but stand up and sit down and kneel. Now, you can understand what people are saying, you can say the prayers like the Our Father and the Creed, you can hand out the Host, anything.” Father Lessinger admitted that he could imagine a role for English in the Mass, saying that at one point during the institution of the post-Vatican II changes, prayers directed toward God were in Latin, and instructions to the people, the readings, and the communion prayer were in English.

“Mass is not just sacramental, it's also weekly booster shot of instruction,” he said. “But this can be achieved— is achieved— through the homily and by rereading the texts in the vernacular, which we do even though it's repetitious.” As it stands, those who attend the Latin Mass universally stated that it was a more elevated, reverent, and mystical experience than the English Mass, and those who attend the English Mass praised it for its approachability and accessibility.

No need for Latin or Hebrew

Building off of this, people who preferred English services saw little need for sacred languages, and largely did not seem to believe that they would contribute anything to the experience. Anthony especially was perplexed by the idea of attending a Latin Mass. “I don't speak Latin,” he said. “I don't understand why God would try to reach people through a language that they don't know at all. Being able to really get the Mass and what's happening is basically the point of going. If I couldn't even follow what people were saying, I think it would be really confusing and I'd feel really shut out. I don't think that's what Catholicism is about. It's supposed to be universal, for everybody to get.” This inversion of the universality of the liturgical language, arguing that the vernacular reaches everyone better than a single language that doesn't belong to anyone, is an interesting angle. If one believes that universality is best achieved by abandoning the sacred language, then one would struggle to find much relevance or reason in Latin and Hebrew services.

Meanwhile, Arielle was very cognizant of Hebrew's role in the history of Judaism, but seemed to share Anthony's skepticism of dependence on a sacred language. “It does kind of connect you back with all the people who spoke it before you, yeah, but it's not like the prayers mean something different in English than they do in Hebrew. You can be just as tied to people by the meaning of what you're saying as by the actual sound of it.” While Traditional Catholics and Conservative Jews largely have intense emotional ties to the external forms of their services— which is not to diminish their attachments to the spiritual content— conciliar Catholics and Reform Jews seem confident that the core

message of their respective faith could be conveyed through any language. Being accustomed to hearing their services in a format that is easy for them to understand and participate in, they have little reason to idealize Latin or Hebrew. They are at home in a religion that has used the vernacular for decades or centuries without ceasing to function, so the sacred language does not seem to add anything.

Chapter 4: Analysis

Roman Catholicism and Judaism both have a sort of exceptionalism and particularism embedded in their underlying philosophies. Judaism has always looked to God's covenant with Abraham, in Genesis 12:2-3, as a moment that distinguished them as a “chosen people,” the specific promise from God that, “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” As Jane, the college aged Conservative Jew said, for much of Western history, the Jewish people have wrestled with the question of assimilation and the pain of persecution, struggling to succeed in a dominant culture that was often incredibly hostile.

On a more metaphorical, less lethal level, similar issues have been in the consciousness of Catholics. In the Gospel according to John 17: 14-16, Jesus says, speaking to God, “I have given [my followers] your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. *They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.*” Many Christians have cited this verse, claiming that they are called to be “in the world but not of it,” that is, fully immersed in life, but abstaining from sinfulness and working for good.

Not only is there an ideological sense that Jews and Catholics are separated from the rest of the world, each religion has been able to point toward a certain city, Jerusalem and Rome, respectively, as a home base that bridges the divide between spiritual and physical. But the vast majority of Jews are not living in Jerusalem, nor do the bulk of the world's Catholics live in Rome. They are religions in diaspora, wandering the earth outside of Israel and Italy, and set apart from their neighbors by their beliefs about their own special nature. It is hardly surprising then, that each of these faiths has developed a tradition of sacred language use, a form of solidarity within the group and distinctiveness from those without it. Latin and Hebrew have been important in Catholicism and Judaism since the

origins of the religions, and for some of their adherents, they continue to be a salient feature of worship.

In my observations and interviews, it was clear that Herder's ideas about the connection between nationhood and language, and Judith Irvine's theories regarding language ideology and speech communities, that is, groups of people with a common language who share a set of expectations regarding how to use it, certainly seem to apply to Latin and Hebrew as the sacred languages of Catholicism and Judaism. But can an argument for the reality of the sacred language as the foundation of a speech community really be made that in the modern day, when many Jews and Catholics have completely abandoned their sacred languages, and even those who do seek out services in Latin and Hebrew report neither knowing nor even *wanting* to know them? The hierarchy has historically studied and learned the languages to some degree of proficiency, and in the past, most educated people within the religions learned something of them, but for most people, if it was only how to read short passages, or recognize key sections of the liturgy.

The laypeople I interviewed, both at B'nai Torah and at St. Ambrose and St. Paul, knew little if any Latin or Hebrew, and none of them were interested in learning, or believed that understanding the words would necessarily lead to a better spiritual experience. I had expected that people with such devotion to the traditional forms of their worship would see understanding their sacred language as a means of becoming even closer to God, or at least a more active and conscientious community member and worshipper, but although they found the language an essential part of the liturgy, they were apathetic or resistant to the idea of learning it. One fairly representative comment came from Joseph Kendermann, the Traditional Catholic father of three, who said, "I don't think it would add anything [to understand the words of Mass]. I think the mystery adds another dimension... I'm not sure how exactly, but there's this power that comes with it, and knowing it's outside your grasp makes it more extraordinary to me."

Perhaps one reason why they feel reluctant to study and understand Latin or Hebrew has to do

with a perception that some aspect of the religion's truth or authority can be found in the incomprehensible words of the prayers. Their mysterious, transcendent nature instills a sense of awe, directed at the divine, of course, but also at the religious leaders who speak them, who wield a great deal of power. The words they speak have power, as discussed in Chapter One, to create a community, to fulfill God's commands (“The children of Israel will keep the Lord's day” and “Do this in memory of me”), to consecrate either a day or the Eucharist, and in some cases, to entreat favors from God, especially prayers for healing, peace, or the conversion of sinners. But there is also additional political power and social capital held by the priest or rabbi as the leader of the congregation and usually the person in charge of the planning and finances of the church or synagogue. As long as they are also given the power to be the sole intermediaries between God and humanity, the only ones who know how to speak the special languages that grant a more meaningful access, they maintain an intense degree of control and authority over the congregation and over the ritual itself.

For the Traditional Catholics from the Society of St. Pius X movement, there is an interesting paradox regarding authority. As a group, they highly value a hierarchical system and humility is considered very virtuous, and there is a great deal of suspicion regarding independence or individualism, as can be seen in the case of religious instruction that relies on rote memorization, rather than using one's own words. Yet because they reject the modern Catholic Church's teachings, and do not trust or follow the office of the Pope—some even claim that no pope for the past 50 years has been legitimate—their commitment to authoritarianism is limited. It seems as though the high degree of reverence paid to the priest, e.g. bowing when the priest enters and exits at the beginning and end of Mass, or a teenage boy telling a teen girl that he will ask the priest for permission to have her brother over for a visit, thereby circumventing their parents' possible disapproval, may be a form of compensation for this conflicting situation. That is, if the church consistently asserts that strict leadership and obedience are necessary for a moral life, while simultaneously denying the legitimacy of

the highest available form of religious leadership, the faithful must find a different way of being deferent and humble. To that end, choosing to remain uneducated in the sacred languages allows them to look at the priest with a greater degree of awe—he is not just the person who organizes the parish affairs, nor even simply the one who transubstantiates the Eucharist. He is the only one who can fully understand every word of the Mass, the only one who has that power. The other worshippers are part of his speech community, but they are not equal members; rather, they must defer to the priest's knowledge and expertise.

To a lesser extent, many contemporary Jewish people do not necessarily subscribe to the belief in a literal God, especially not an anthropomorphic, just, omnipotent being who brought their ancestors out of Egypt or decides who will win the next game of the playoffs. The people I interviewed, both at B'nai Torah and Etz Chayim, largely expressed agnosticism, with some admitting to complete atheism, but did not find this incompatible with Judaism, which they treated more like an ethnicity. Both Arielle Schulman, who was Reform, and Joy Auerbach told me the same joke about this newly widespread culture of Jewish agnosticism: “A Jewish man enrolls his young son in the best private school in town, which happens to be a Christian school called Trinity Day School. One afternoon, his son says to him, 'Dad, do you know what Trinity means? It means God has three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.' His father says to him, 'What is this blasphemy?! David, listen to me. There is only one God! And we don't believe in him!'” In the absence of faith in an all-powerful, all-knowing God, it may be that the mystery of Hebrew invests the ceremony with some greater dignity and legitimacy. The rabbi's knowledge gives him a greater degree of access, if not to the divine, then at least to the traditions and literature, and while the congregants join with him in prayer, they are only partially understanding of the meaning of specific words. This can create a greater sense of the majesty and wonder that are missing from a religion that is moving towards humanism for many of its members.

Furthermore, the Catholic Church has officially affirmed the importance of Latin, in a document

called *Veterum Sapientia*, released in 1962. The institutional understanding of the sacred language's significance differs in many ways with the theoretical understandings previously discussed. While it does not contradict the idea that the sacred language provides a sense of identity, (and in fact its arguments neatly complement that assertion) it offers a variety of other ideas, most of which were echoed to some extent by the people I spoke to at B'nai Torah and St. Ambrose and St. Paul. The core benefits of sacred languages, as highlighted by *Veterum Sapientia* are “universality,” “immutability,” and “non-vernacularity.”

Immutability

Although Pope John XXIII claims in *Veterum Sapientia* that a sacred language “must be ... immutable. Modern languages are liable to change, and no single one of them is superior to the others in authority,” and that Latin fits this criteria by being “set and unchanging. It has long since ceased to be affected by those alterations in the meaning of words which are the normal result of daily, popular use...” neither Latin nor Hebrew (nor, I would posit, any language still is used to express new ideas) is truly immutable. Each of these languages, though popularly conceived of as “dead languages,” has undergone some linguistic changes since their days as national tongues. Medieval Latin and Rabbinic or Modern Hebrew are, in a variety of ways, quite different from their respective classical forms, the outcome of centuries of being used in writing. Language naturally changes through being spoken, by being adapted by each person who uses it, as each generation coins new slang and alters the standards of what is acceptable.¹

Yet in these cases, neither language was commonly spoken, and people learned them not through the conventional language acquisition method of hearing it as a baby and gradually imitating the

¹ For example, English has undergone both large changes, like the evolutions from Old to Middle to Modern English, and more minor changes, like the addition of the colloquial definition of “cool” to express approval, or the historical variability of whether split infinitives have been acceptable. (Originally they were not stigmatized, but later, in an effort to apply rules of Romantic grammar to English, which belongs to the Teutonic language family, they were deemed incorrect. Recently, they have once again attained some measure of acceptability, but certain prescriptivist linguists and grammarians continue to stubbornly advise against them.)

sounds, but through careful and methodical instruction long after infancy. But neither Hebrew nor Latin was static during these centuries. Medieval Latin is noted for its “creative” orthography, its increased use of prepositions instead of simply putting words into the ablative case,² and a greater flexibility in word order³. The Hebrew of religious scholars in the middle ages is also different from classical biblical Hebrew. Much as medieval Latin is more likely to include superfluous prepositions, rabbinic Hebrew generally uses the word “של”⁴ to mean “of,” where biblical Hebrew simply shows possession by putting the possessive noun and its object side by side. It also saw changes in the way that verbs were conjugated, with the simple past tense and continuous past tense conjugated in the way that Modern Hebrew now does.

In short, it is incorrect to claim that sacred languages were spared from any kind of change due to being out of the common usage, and to assert that erases the hundreds of writers whose toiling kept the languages relevant. The fact that the languages changed is a sign of their vitality, suppressed though it was, because the changes were a byproduct of use. Each new book, epistle, or story in the sacred language may have contained “mistakes” that became semi-standardized, but these minor evolutions are the proof that Hebrew and Latin were still considered important enough to be learned to some degree. The changes should not be decried or sighed over, but celebrated as the pulse of a language community, which, though it was weak, did prevent its total demise.

However, interviews with parishioners and members of St. Ambrose and St. Paul and B'nai Torah revealed that to some extent, the perceived immutability of Latin and Hebrew is a major draw for those who choose to worship there. Most of them reported a sense of awe at the idea that they are speaking

²In languages with case systems, in which nouns, adjectives, and adverbs receive suffixes that denote what role they play in the sentence (whether they are the subject, possessive, the direct or indirect object, or part of a prepositional phrase, or modifying a noun in one of those positions) using prepositions is not incorrect, but often superfluous. For example, to a Roman, “Puer puellae floribus dat,” means “The boy gives flowers to the girl,” without including a word that specifically means “to,” just as clearly as “Puer ad puellae floribus dat” does.

³ Though Latin does not have a strict word order under any circumstances, the most common formula in classical Latin was Subject-Object-Verb. Medieval Latin’s word order was often influenced by the native language of the writer.

⁴ Pronounced shel, this word is a contraction of a phrase that means “which belongs to”

the same words as the saints and martyrs and holy people who have come before them, and spoke of a sense of history that links them to their own ancestors and their spiritual role models and predecessors. The fact that linguistic change does happen, and has affected their languages, did not matter to them, and was not something that seemed to be on their radar. The rhetoric used by the establishment of the religion to explain their actions is believed and affirmed by the members of the worshipping community, regardless of the facts of historical linguistic progress.

Non-vernacularity

Though we have established that people did continue to learn and adapt Latin and Hebrew during their periods of dormancy, and that they were not relegated to a kind of linguistic artifact status, it cannot be denied that for many centuries, they were not at all true vernacular languages. This is an important quality for sacred languages, because their extraordinary role as a link to the divine require them to be special, and in these cases, their rarity and antique status distinguishes them as unusual, momentous, and mysterious. While the prayers that one says individually in daily life may be routine enough to be in the vernacular, a private word with God, when it comes to a public ritual, the situation calls for something more formal and spectacular, a language that has no place in the street or other mundane settings. *Veterum Sapientia* here is insightful and correct in its assertion that because the religion “has a dignity far surpassing that of every merely human society ... the language it uses should be noble, majestic, and non-vernacular.” The language that becomes a religion’s sacred mode of communication is not necessarily an ancient or classical tongue, but that has been true in the cases of Catholicism and Judaism. It is not the age of the language that matters— Lakota people use a dialect of approximately the same age as their usual language— but its perceived venerability. Adherents of the religion must see “their” language as holy and honorable, above the rank of a normal human language and set apart from the usual settings of their world. This criteria is fulfilled by Latin and Hebrew, at least in the historical popular opinion of most Catholics and Jews, and those who today choose to

attend services in these languages. Hebrew, excepting the Modern Hebrew which was only developed in conjunction with the State of Israel, has long been colloquially referred to as Leshon HaKodesh, לשון הקודש, which means “the holy language.” It may summon a variety of associations for the average Jewish person, such as the patriarchs of Biblical times, the rabbis and their writings, or the holidays of the Jewish calendar, which are referred to by Hebrew names, but it is certainly not considered a regular and mundane part of life. Instead it is revered, and so are the books and scrolls that contain it, which are to be kissed if they fall or are shelved upside down. Joy Auerbach, a member of B'nai Torah who reads from the Torah nearly every Saturday mornings, said, “Having the service in English would just feel so much like a part of everyday life, not something that was set aside or special and different. The Hebrew makes it about more than that, the everyday stuff.”

Latin is similarly conceived of as an exceptional language in much of Catholic teaching. *Veterum Sapientia* states that “The Church has ever held ... in the highest esteem ... especially the ... Latin language... in which wisdom itself is cloaked, as it were, in a vesture of gold. ... [whose] ‘concise, varied and harmonious style, full of majesty and dignity’ makes for singular clarity and impressiveness of expression.” Of course, objectively speaking, no language is truly superior than another, and no language is uniquely holy. But these two have acquired reputations as sacrosanct and noble through their roles in the liturgy and in religious scholarship, and so they are revered as the holy vessels by which holy teachings are transmitted. As Renoir says, “It is very important to address God in a secret language, different from the one for buying two penny-worth of fried potatoes.” (New York Review of Books, c1958, 2001: 137)

The fact that Hebrew and Latin are not vernacular means that most common people in the religion, those without the financial or intellectual means to study them, have limited to no understanding of them. This, however, only heightens the effect of their perceived holiness, because it further removes the divine matters from the daily minutia. Part of their power, then, is derived from

their incomprehensibility and their mysteriousness, which elevate them above the level of the normal worshipper, who hears in them a reminder of both the grandeur of God and the scope of his ignorance. As discussed, most laypeople had no interest in learning Latin or Hebrew, instead choosing to give the power of sacred languages to their leaders.

Universality in Sacred Languages

A religion can be, and often is, an important aspect of group identity, bonding together people who live in different countries or different eras, whose daily realities may be incredibly dissimilar. This itself is a manifestation of the human need to form communities, no matter where we find ourselves. But while forming bonds with one's neighbors and family members is as easy as it is natural, it is much more difficult to feel a sense of community with people across the globe with whom one's only connection is a belief in the same God. On a more practical level, it would be challenging to prevent people from vastly different social milieux from changing the original beliefs and practices of their once shared religion to fit their own cultures and needs. Just as Latin morphed over to time into Spanish, Romanian, French, and Italian, there has been danger of Catholicism and Judaism transforming into a host of different adaptations of the original core beliefs.

To avoid this problem, *Veterum Sapientia* says that a religion that has adherents living in "countless nations," each of which has its own culture and language, must have some way of crossing linguistic borders to ensure that there is widespread mutual understanding. Rather than choose a single one of the languages spoken by the faithful, even the most widely known one, as this *lingua franca*, it is more prudent to select one that does not belong to a single nation, but is commonly taught to citizens of different countries. This is exemplified by both Catholicism and Judaism's relationships with their respective languages, as the faithful of each religion have historically been scattered over a wide geographical range, whether due to evangelism or diaspora. Catholicism's Latin has been "a maternal voice acceptable to countless nations," (1962) hearkening back to the early days of the Church, and

presenting a contemporary body of leadership removed from conventional governments, while Hebrew has historically unified Jews through its nature as the language of the ancient Kingdom of Israel and greatest thinkers of the decades since the fall of the temple. This topic was one that emerged in nearly every single interview I did, even with Catholics and Jews who attended vernacular liturgies. As discussed in Chapter 3, they generally felt that the routine of the the liturgy was enough consistency to sustain a sense of familiarity in different places, while those who preferred Latin and Hebrew for their services picked the sacred language as the quality that would create that “sameness.”

Another key benefit of sacred languages, according to the people Traditional Catholics and Conservative Jews, is they avoid the issues that arise from the translation process. While this was something that people who attended Traditional and Conservative services seemed extremely conscientious of, those who attended services in the vernacular were more trusting of the translation. Father Lessinger criticized the popular English translation of the Mass, saying that although its 2011 changes, which made the wording closer to the original Latin⁵, “removed some really obvious mistakes and intentional errors in the missal, and so it was a huge leap forward for accuracy. But ... it's hard to enforce these changes. There are still priests saying the words of the consecration with 'shed for you and for all' instead of 'for you and for many,' ... these liturgies are fictional and they remain fictional.”

The Conservative movement of Judaism also includes people who concern themselves greatly with the proper translation of different prayers and terms. Most of the luncheons following services would involve spirited discussions about the meanings of different words, especially “Adonai,” which some people claimed should not be translated “Lord” because of its Christian connotations. By avoiding wide-scale debates along these semantic lines, whose apparent pettiness belie their theological

5 One example of this is the “et cum spiritu tuo” exchange. At several points in the Mass, the priest says to the congregation, “The Lord be with you” or “Peace be with you” (in Latin, *Dominus vobiscum* or *Pax vobiscum*). The congregation traditionally responded “et cum spiritu tuo.” The translation of this phrase in the era between Vatican II and 2011 was “and also with you,” but more recently, it has been rendered “and with your spirit.” Both translations have essentially the same force, but the latter translation is more influenced by the original Latin, using a cognate of “spiritu” rather than dropping the word entirely.

significance, the use of a sacred language helps to unify the beliefs of its religion's adherents. If the terms of a religion's doctrine are established in one single language, there is less room for debate, especially among the less educated adherents of a faith.

The modern implementation of vernacular languages in Jewish and Catholic services coincides with other liberal, congregant-friendly innovations, like the allowing of women to read from the *bimah* and the altar, the acceptance of interfaith marriage, and in the case of Judaism, the embracing of queer people. These efforts seem to have been intended to encourage greater participation from laypeople, but it is hard to say to what extent this was effective. People who choose to go to services and Mass in Latin and Hebrew seem to be more likely to have extremely regular weekly attendance, and mentioned incorporating prayer and other religious activities in their lives more than those who attend vernacular services. But the people who attend services and Mass in the vernacular do seem to largely appreciate the more laypeople-centered and progressive attitude, and cite social justice issues as some of the reasons they would be opposed to joining the Traditional or Conservative movement. Natalie in particular seemed to associate the Latin Mass with archaic social policies, and said, "It isn't the Latin exactly that's the problem—I wouldn't go back to the old Mass because it would be giving up so much. I wouldn't be able to go in with my head uncovered, let alone give out the hosts. It would be a huge step back." Though this correlation does seem to exist, it is certainly not the purpose of having a sacred language, and many of the people who identified strongly as members of the Traditionalist movement and Conservative branch spoke about benefits and advantages of Latin and Hebrew that had nothing to do with political opinions. The reasons for the Latin Mass that were cited in *Veterum Sapientia*—its immutability, universality, and non-vernacularity—were, to some extent, reflected in the experiences of Traditional Catholics and Conservative Jews, but with perhaps somewhat different nuances than Pope John XXIII intended.

Conclusion

Latin and Hebrew are often called dead languages, but the fact is that they have endured for centuries without native speakers, in the form of religious ceremonies, prayers, and texts used in Roman Catholicism and Judaism. Their status as sacred languages is multifaceted: they are used to designate a moment or book as holy, often as part of a ritual, and in doing so they sometimes take on a perceived divine quality, especially since it is rare for laypeople to understand their words. The mysteriousness of these foreign languages, combined with their connection to God, can imbue Latin and Hebrew with a certain air of sanctity in their own rights, as sort of linguistic relics. The leaders of liturgies in the sacred languages are given an incredible amount of power, as they are the only people who thoroughly understand the words. The services are active, action-oriented events that effect something very meaningful for the worshippers: their communities are formed and validated, and for Catholics, miracles occur. This very real form of “magic” is facilitated by those who know the language, mostly the clergy, who take on an immense amount of importance and authority as the keepers of tradition and orthodoxy. Especially in the modern day, when both Traditional Catholics and Conservative Jews struggle with questioning the legitimacy of their own historical authority figures, the language and the power it gives their leaders is crucial for maintaining a sense of orderliness.

But perhaps the most noteworthy feature of sacred languages is their role in identity formation for Catholics and Jews who attend services in Latin and Hebrew. Because the languages are closely tied up with a sense of community with Catholics and Jews of previous generations and other nationalities, and because they are a clear marker of difference, separating Catholicism and Judaism from other religions, Latin and Hebrew help to create a sense of identity. The use of a shared, sacred language serves to unite the people, allowing them to exchange ideas on doctrine and interpretation, remain in agreement on important matters, and continue to conceive of themselves as a people despite distance or the passage of generations. The faithful are not gathered simply by their religion, but as a speech

community as well, doubly uniting them in *communitas*. In fact, the sacred language facilitates a sense of the religion as its own quasi-nation made up of all worshippers who find that they help to transcend the boundaries and oppressions that exist in daily life. Latin and Hebrew serve the role of a religious mother tongue, shaping the relationship between the Catholic or Jew and the rest of the world. They situate those who study them in the framework of a large network of like-minded worshippers, and ensure that worshippers stay unified in their beliefs and ideologies, retaining their identity as God's "True Church" or "Chosen People." Thus, their religious identity comes to supersede all other identities, going beyond all other nationalities and regional allegiances. This simultaneously depoliticizes the religion, elevating it above the realm of human nations and countries, and transforms it into a supernatural community that unites adherents from across the globe into a new, sanctified state—the Kingdom of God.

Rationally speaking, Latin and Hebrew are not the languages of God or the angels, but they are the languages used to communicate with, or about, the divine in a way that consciously identifies the speaker with their religion. They are no longer the languages of casual communication or superficial matters, but have taken on an extremely intense extra sense and symbolic nature, representing for their proponents the history and unity of their religion. For some, who hope for progress and greater equality than has been seen in the past, these languages and the things they represent can be confusing at best and alienating at worst. But regardless of intra-community debates about the future of each language in its respective religion, it is impossible to deny that each of them has played important roles historically, and continues to contribute to the spiritual life of those who use them.

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