

**ROMAN CATHOLICS IN ENGLAND: STUDIES IN SOCIAL STRUCTURE SINCE THE SECOND WORLD WAR** by Michael P. Hornsby-Smith. *Cambridge University Press*. 1987 Pp. xiii + 253. £19.50.

Michael Hornsby-Smith, who teaches at the University of Surrey, and who is already well-known for his work on contemporary British Catholicism, has based this book on a decade of sociological research and on five specific studies carried out between 1974 and 1982. This research was into the state of mind of the Catholic laity and not of the priesthood. The priesthood do appear, as when lay-persons were asked, for example, to rate priests as 'visitors': my own non-Catholic experience suggests that the laity often have a private definition of what counts as a 'visit', and that their definition excludes some occasions when priests imagine that they are 'visiting'. And when Catholics were asked whether they had 'had a serious discussion with a priest about religious problems within the last two years', one hesitates (as no doubt Hornsby-Smith himself hesitated) about the implications of 'serious', 'religious' and 'discussion'. Such problems are inevitable in this kind of survey, but one does well to remember that replies to questions are not necessarily answers.

What are Hornsby-Smith's principal conclusions? First, that although British Catholicism still has a high proportion of first-generation immigrants there are few barriers to occupational achievement for Irish people entering England, who are substantially assimilated structurally by the second generation. Marriage to a British spouse or to a non-Catholic accelerated the acceptance of cultural change.

Second, he concluded that any model of the British Catholic community as homogeneous, disciplined and conforming had little basis. There is a growing division between an educated, articulate middle-class group of activists who know how to take advantage of the processes of consultation set up after Vatican Two, and the mass of relatively passive, working-class Catholics who take little part in the internal politics of the Church. Hornsby-Smith thinks that the 'fortress' image of the Church was out of date by 1980, because so many people were questioning papal authority and dissenting actively from official teaching on matters like birth-control, while others were alienated by the official softening of disapproval of mixed marriages, the abolition of Friday abstinence and the use of English in the liturgy. Whereas in 1960 one-third of English Catholics were in religiously mixed marriages and one in eight in canonically invalid marriages, by the 1970s two-thirds were in mixed marriages and one-third in canonically invalid marriages. This was not the kind of change which could be reversed by papal visits or by episcopal rhetoric.

Hornsby-Smith is reluctant to describe what has happened as decline, but he concedes that the shift from a 'closed' to an 'open' Catholicism has had serious consequences for the political influence of the Roman Catholic Church in Britain. There is, he says, barely a surviving 'Catholic ethic', because convergence at the lay level with the secular attitudes of the social majority has almost established a new norm. This does not mean that Catholics have been 'protestantised', but the kind of private decision-making which characterizes Protestantism has penetrated deeply into the Catholic sub-culture. As a result, Hornsby-Smith says, 'there will be no prophetic uprising of five and a half million Catholics to bring the good news to the poor' — they have assimilated British complacency too well. Politicians, he implies, need no longer regard the Catholic vote as ecclesiastically conditioned.

For all the soberness of the sociological research which underlies his conclusions, Hornsby-Smith is making drastic judgements. Discounting the effect of both the National Pastoral Congress of 1980 and of the Pope's visit in 1982, both of which were intended to reinvigorate the Catholic Church in England, he argues that English Catholicism is most likely to become a historical relic, a domesticated denomination, indistinguishable in its religious beliefs and values from other Christian bodies, and in its social and political morality from other citizens. And he points out that the end of large-scale population

movement between Ireland and Britain means that Catholicism will gradually lose its apparent links with the working-classes.

As a study in social structure *Roman Catholics in England* no doubt gives an accurate broad picture. On the other hand, whoever supposed that five and a half million Catholics (or Protestants for that matter) *would* rise up prophetically to bring the good news to the poor? Nor is it necessarily bad news for society if the more extreme religious pressure-groups which emerge from denominational structures are going to find it more difficult in the future to whip up mass support. Religious mass movements are rarely pretty to watch. English Catholicism may have become domesticated, but at least the Catholic Church in England has been spared the disastrous history of the Church in France since 1815. On the contrary, the most important single event in the history of British Catholicism since 1850 has been the *uneventful* passing into British society of great numbers of Irish immigrants. 'Roman Catholicism', after all, is the work of priestly imagination; what is needed is for that imagination to turn in upon itself something after the manner of Gorbachovian Russians turning in anguish to look more closely at their own history. The laity cannot take the place of the priesthood at this point. Hornsby-Smith's examination of the state of the laity seems to me to tell us too little about the present and future of Roman Catholics in England just because of the absence of a close study of the state of the priestly imagination.

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**LIBERATION THEOLOGY: THE ESSENTIAL FACTS ABOUT THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT IN LATIN AMERICA AND BEYOND** by Phillip Berryman. *I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., London, 1987. Pp. 231. (no price given).*

Phillip Berryman has written detailed and extensive studies on Central America, drawing on his experience as a priest in Panama in the 1960s and early 1970s. He is no longer a priest but has maintained his interest in Latin America. There are now many books of liberation theology and not a few about it, but Berryman's latest work fills a gap and does indeed supply 'the essential facts'. It is direct and uncluttered, giving the reader access to background information not readily available. Berryman is clearly sympathetic to the movement, but points out some of its limitations and current problems.

The book opens with the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero in San Salvador in 1980. This sets the tone of realism and wards off any false romantic or utopian views of the movement. A brief history of missions to Latin America leads into the immediate background; the impact of Vatican II, the episcopal conference at Medellin in 1968, the growth of the 'base communities', the emergence of liberation theology, especially in the work of Gutierrez, the conscientization programme of Paulo Freire, and the episcopal conference at Puebla in 1979. The main points are familiar, but the story is told from within and new connections are made. This is particularly true with regard to the base communities and 'popular religion', which in the nature of things are not well documented.

A distinctive contribution which Berryman makes is to add the Central American dimension. 'In my opinion the experience of the Sandinista revolution since 1979 has injected greater realism into the discussion of what "liberation" might mean for Latin American countries.' Christians actively participated in the revolution in Nicaragua in a way which they did not in Cuba. Tensions have been heightened with the conservative backlash of the 1980s, not only from outside, with the Pope's 'Polish View of Marxism' and the intervention of Cardinal Ratzinger against Leonardo Boff, but from inside, exemplified in the activities of the Columbian bishop Lopez Trujillo and the Nicaraguan Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo.

Liberation theology will continue despite these attacks, but Berryman ends with some criticisms raised for the Latin Americans by other liberation theologies throughout the world. Whether they can respond to these challenges is less clear.

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