Priests, People and Parishes in Change: Reflections of a Sociologist

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During the past twenty years a massive literature has grown up on the implications for the life of the Roman Catholic Church of modern social changes and shifts in theological emphasis legitimated by the Second Vatican Council. Nevertheless, it would be useful to try to summarize from a sociological standpoint the overall effect of those changes and shifts in the role of the parochial clergy of England and Wales and on their relationship with the laity.[1]

Social change and the Church—the recent past[2]
The Roman Catholic community in these countries broadly can be said to comprise six distinct strands in terms of social origins and cultural heritage. First of all there is the largely aristocratic and upper middle class strand, derived from the recusant gentry, in decline since the restoration of the hierarchy in 1850. The second strand consists of a significant infusion of converts[3]. The third, by far the most important numerically, is the mass of Irish immigrants over the past century and a half[4]. About the size and significance of the last three strands we know remarkably little in any detail: Catholic refugees arriving in the 1930s and 1940s from Eastern Europe (especially Poland), and Catholic migrant workers and their families from the Mediterranean countries and from the Caribbean.

Of these various strands, the most significant from the point of view of the emergence of the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales as a significant religious and political force is undoubtedly the Irish strand.[5]

For Irish immigrants and their families, the inner city parish, at least up to World War Two, was the focal point not only for religious worship, but also for the social, cultural, educational and entertainment needs of its members[6]. It seems that the Catholic parish at this time was all-embracing in the scope of its claims and influence and it maintained relatively high barriers against outsiders. Thus religiously mixed marriages were relatively infrequent and were stigmatised by the institutional Church[7].

Since the passing of the 1944 Education Act and the big expansion of educational opportunities during the period up to the

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1970s, however, the situation has changed[8]. For the first time Catholics were growing their own "new middle class" of first-generation professional, managerial and administrative workers with educational and occupational skills equal to or exceeding those of many of the parish clergy. Inevitably there were changes in priest-lay relations as some of the educated laity came increasingly to expect styles of consultation in parish decision making which they experienced at work.

Catholics are probably prone to interpret the Second Vatican Council simply in terms of the inspired whim of a charismatic pope, John XXIII. Increasingly in human terms it seems more likely that it represented the response of the world's largest organisation to the traumatic global changes which followed the Second World War. Among these changes likely to affect the Church as a social institution, world wide industrialisation and urbanisation, the process of decolonialisation, the threat of nuclear war or mass starvation, the growing imbalance in power and in access to the necessities for human dignity, and the revolution in communications which brought home to all people the realities of human inequalities and injustices are of obvious importance. The response of the Church as formulated and legitimated by the Council was to shift the nature of understanding of the Church dramatically, notably in the key dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*[9]. The key concept in the new understanding was that of the "People of God", all with their own gifts and ministries.

There has, then, been a significant shift in the dominant model of the Church. I tried to describe a heuristic model of pre-Vatican Catholicism of England and Wales in *Roman Catholic Opinion*[10]; here I briefly recall what I said there.

Avery Dulles offered five alternative models of the Church for consideration (Dulles, 1976). It seems clear that his institutional model conforms most closely to the sociological reality of the Church in the 1950s. He suggested that by itself this model tends to be doctrinaire and to result in rigidity and conformity. As an organisation appropriate for a stable unchanging world it manifests the characteristics of a mechanistic organisation such as a distinct hierarchical structure of control, authority and communication. The combined findings of various studies (Burns and Stalker, 1966; Neal, 1970; Greeley, 1972a; Pro Mundi Vita, 1973; Winter, 1973; Moore, 1975; Reidy and White, 1977; Sharratt, 1977) suggest that there is a close relationship between the emphasis on a transcendent God, a hierarchically structured Church, an authoritarian clergy and social distance between the clergy and the laity. This is observable at the parish level as well as elsewhere. Thus a study found in the liturgical dimension in one parish's life "an emphasis on the objectivity of the sacramental system... (and) the priest maintains his social distance
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and emphasises his separation from the laity...by discouraging full lay-involvement in worship''. In this parish the sermon provides an opportunity to legitimate traditional practices and reinforce traditional status and power differentials, and the priest, by exercising control over information, can discourage ecumenical ventures and lay initiative. Separation from contamination by the world is stressed and though there is the exercise of charity in order to save souls there is a rejection of social and political involvement as a requirement of the gospel (Leslie, 1980). These themes are also implicit in the four theses proposed by Metz for a renewed Church. These theses suggest that the traditional church was ''over-adapted'' to the world, with an absence of prophecy, and controlled by ''an ecclesial authority based on juridical-administrative competency'' (Metz, 1978).

Social change and the Church—the probable future

And what is the contemporary situation? Dulles offered four models in addition to the institutional model. These are the models of community, associated in particular with the image of the People of God; the model of the Church as sacrament or sign and instrument of union with God and the unity of all mankind; the kerygmatic model which emphasizes faith and proclamation over interpersonal relations and mystical communion; and the diaconal or servant model of the Church, which seeks to carry on the mission of Christ by serving the world and fostering the brotherhood of all men[11]. In his evaluation of the models Dulles predicted that five trends, noticeable in the recent history of the Church, will continue. These are (Dulles, 188—190)

1 the modernisation of structures and the harmonisation of a more functional approach to authority and accountability with the traditional Christian conception of authority as service;
2 the development of ecumenical cooperation;
3 the development of an internal pluralism in place of the historical accident of strong centralisation;
4 while the Church must continue to provide an area of relative stability in a changing world in order to maintain meaningful relationships with the past, there will be an increasing element of ''provisionality'' about Church decisions taken in the light of transient needs and opportunities; and
5 in the diaspora situation of the Church of today the Church will have to rule more by persuasion than by force.

In the United States Greeley has suggested that there is an emergence of the ''communal Catholic'' who is committed to the world-view of Catholicism and to Catholicism as a collectivity, who is reflective and self-conscious about his Catholic heritage but who has minimal expectations of the ecclesiastical institution and who reserves the right to reinterpret the Catholic world to meet his own needs (Greeley,

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1976, 9—10). According to Greeley, in order to recapture its credibility the ecclesial institution must begin to acquire certain characteristics.

Firstly, it must be both tentative and humble but not indifferent and slipshod ('The communal Catholics I know are unanimous on one point: most priests are terrible preachers' —p. 186). Secondly, it must be respectful of its rich heritage, yet radical in its search for better alternatives to present social structures. Thirdly, it must be both relaxed and committed: 'tranquil because it believe in the power of God's love; but...committed because it believes that God's love demands a response' (p. 189). Fourthly, it must be both intellectual and sensitive ('Don't shout at him, rant at him, hector him, hassle him... For the communal Catholic Church must also be prepared to listen. It must not only be intellectual, it must also be sympathetic, sensitive, and comprehending... There is the need for a church with the self-discipline, self-confidence and self-restraint to listen and listen carefully'—pp. 190—192). Fifthly, it must be both realistic (because 'the communal Catholic has been around') and hopeful so that 'he will be able to renew the struggle against discouragements, failures, and frustrations of life and the weakness, inadequacy, narrowness, and pettiness of his own personality' (p. 193). Finally, it must not only be mature, treating him like an adult and not a child, but also playful, joyous and enthusiastic.

Greeley sees these as seeming paradoxes. A similar sense of reconciliation is beautifully conveyed by Cardinal Suenens in his dialogue with Dom Helder Camara (1979, 9). Suenens rejects the inevitability of a "verticalism-horizontalism" conflict and argues that *both* spiritual renewal *and* temporal commitment are characteristics of the contemporary Church.

In organisational terms the organic management system outlined by Burns and Stalker (1966, 121) appears to describe the post-Vatican Church remarkably well. Against the bureaucratic or mechanistic model which was found to be appropriate in a stable environment, in a changing situation there are new and unfamiliar problems which cannot easily be distributed among the specialist roles in a hierarchy of offices. Responsibilities, methods and approaches need to be constantly redefined and reallocated among all those participating in the common tasks. Each individual brings his own skills and knowledge to bear and interaction runs laterally as much as vertically. Communication between people of different rank resembles consultation with equals rather than commands and directives issued vertically downwards to subordinates. In an unstable situation omniscience can no longer be attributed to the organizational head (whether chairman of a multinational enterprise, or the pope, bishop or parish priest). Etzioni's analysis of the nature of compliance in
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organisations would also suggest that as the nature of power, sanctions and rewards employed shifts from the coercive (e.g. hell fire and damnation; social ostracism and stigmatisation) to the normative (in terms of the persuasive power of approved models of behaviour), so the type of involvement of the lower participants (e.g. the laity) is likely to shift from the alienative, through the calculative (*How Far Can You Go?* David Lodge, 1980) to moral involvement based on the internalisation of the norms of the Church and identification with the aims of the religious leadership (Etzioni, 1961).[12]

The priest and thirty years of social change
Having outlined two contrasting models of the Church in pre-Vatican and post-Vatican times it is necessary to consider how this shift of models has affected the parish clergy. One of the difficulties we have is the sheer absence of research materials on the role of the priest. In his study of a Liverpool parish in the 1950s Conor Ward (Ward, 1961) reported systematic visiting of people in their homes by the parish clergy every six weeks (p.58) in this inner city, largely Irish parish which only extended over an area of three quarters of a square mile (pp.38—9). There are no reasons to suppose that this level of visiting was anything like typical for all parishes in England and Wales in the 1950s though it is certainly likely that the average level of parish visiting has declined significantly in recent years in response to changes in the role of the priest and the impact of social change generally. Priests now appear more frequently to have multiple roles as chaplains to schools, hospitals and prisons, they are required to serve on more committees both civic and diocesan, and the changing nature of work has contributed to the loss of the rhythm of regular home visiting. In addition many mothers now work and there is the near-universality of evening television viewing by families. The general increase in the standard of living since the 1950s has meant that many people are more mobile and less likely to be found at home by the visiting priest. When I interviewed fifteen priests in four parishes in the mid-1970s one view expressed by a young curate was that 'One good night's visiting (for supper) is better than visiting twenty people in one road for five minutes to talk about pleasantries'. Other young priests felt that inflexible evening meal times in the presbytery inhibited such pastoral work. A number of them stressed the importance of finding the people where they were and consciously set out to pursue their pastoral work in pubs or in social clubs (Hornsby-Smith, 1980c).

One of the earliest analyses of the social roles of the parish priest was given by Fr. Joseph Fichter in his study of *Social Relations in the Urban Parish* (1954) in the United States. He identified nine roles which he termed the communal (participating in social as well as

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individual relationships), administrative (concerned with the organisation and management of the parish), businessman (raising and administering funds for the maintenance of the plant), the civic role (in community activities as the symbol and interpreter of Catholicism), recreational, ameliorative (concerned with groups performing the corporal works of mercy), educational, sociospiritual (in both the large formal and the small informal religious organisations) and the liturgical role. Fichter observed that each priest had to have a minimum adeptness in each of these nine roles.

In a later study of priests, Fichter in *Religion as an Occupation* (1966) analysed some of the basic conflicts inherent in the role of the priest as a key official in the religious organisation but also as a professional. There is a major literature on the nature of professional-bureaucrat conflict (see, e.g. Blau and Scott, 1966) which focusses on the different control structures. Briefly, the bureaucrat is controlled by his superior in a vertical hierarchy of offices and his loyalty is directed towards the organisation. The professional, by contrast, is typically controlled by his colleague peer group and his loyalties are directed horizontally to his professional colleagues from whom he derives his standards of behaviour. Inevitably there are conflicts when a professional is employed in an organisation. This has been explored most frequently in the case of scientists employed by industrial organisations and a number of ''accommodative mechanisms'' have been devised to reduce the potential tensions.

This type of conflict can be seen clearly in the case of the relationship between the young curate and the older parish priest. In organisational terms the parish priest is the superior official in the parochial structure of the diocese. As an official in a bureaucratically administered organisation (to follow Max Weber's ideal-type of bureaucracy; Weber, 1947, 321—41) the parish priest is entitled to issue instructions downwards, to his subordinate, the curate, who must then faithfully follow them out according to the standardised procedures of the organisation. On the other hand the curate might well feel that he is a professional colleague, that he has undergone a lengthy and systematic training, and that on these grounds he is entitled to participate in joint decision-making on such matters as the liturgical style of the parish. This problem is perhaps exacerbated in the Catholic Church where, as Ranson and his colleagues pointed out (Ranson et al 1977) 'in general where relatively elderly people have been kept in positions of inferiority and subordination for long periods one might seriously expect to discover attitudes of dissent, resentment or disenchantment' (p.24).

In my interviews with fifteen priests in four English parishes in the mid-1970s (Hornsby-Smith, 1980c, 515—7) there were several references to these conflicts. One senior priest, for example, wondered

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whether he would celebrate his silver jubilee in the priesthood before he was appointed to be parish priest for the first time. Young priests expressed their resistance to the intrusion of bureaucratic relationships into what they considered should be the professional relationship between colleagues. Some also complained that they found irksome the constraints imposed by a traditional model of the priest who maintained social distance from lay people. Generally there is a considerable body of research evidence of a generation gap among priests. Thus in an in-depth study of an American archdiocese it was reported that 'pastors (parish priests) stress the importance of maintaining and expanding church structures, meeting financial obligations, and administering the parish effectively, while curates want to devote more time and energy to community development and their own personal growth' (Hall and Schneider, 1973). Similarly in a study of priests in the Wellington diocese, New Zealand, in 1973 it was reported that 'increased age and higher status within the Church hierarchy (at least somewhat related to age) are...the biggest contributors to traditionalism' (Reidy and White, 1977, 237) in attitudes to involvement in the parish community, morality and priestly life style, modernization of the Church, ecumenism and the relaxation of traditional Sunday Mass obligation.

In a survey of members of the Society of the Divine Word (Pro Mundi Vita, 1973) 8% of the 25—35 age group expressed pre-Vatican theological orientations compared to 57% of the over 65s. Forty-seven percent of the younger group selected post-Vatican theologies compared to only 5% of the oldest age group and it was reported that age was a major distinguishing variable, more so than region or continent (Pro Mundi Vita, 1973).

Reidy and White in New Zealand (1977) and Reilly in a study of all priests in one American diocese (1975) both found that younger priests gave more emphasis to "prophetic" activities than administrative duties. I have also noted in a previous paper (1980a) that seminarians at Wonersh tended to emphasise the "prophetic" rather than the "priestly" aspects of the role, at least in terms of the distinction made by Weber.[13]

Perhaps the main explanation for the crisis in the priesthood focusses on the supposed loss of functions of priests,[14] exacerbated by the emergence of the various "caring" professions such as the social work profession. Whereas it has been said that in the nineteenth century the priest was 'often the patriarch of his parish, its ruler, its doctor, its lawyer, its magistrate, as well as its teacher, before whom vice trembled and rebellion dared not show itself' (Dean Church quoted in Ranson, 1977, 61), it is now agreed that priests have become marginal to society. In a fascinating account of *The Fate of the Anglican Clergy,* Towler and Coxon (1979) have pointed out that the

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priest's monopoly over specialised skills, which is one of the marks of a profession, has been steadily eroded as the educational level and participation of the laity have increased. This has left 'the clergyman as the spokesman rather than the supernaturally authorised leader, and (substituted) presiding ministers where formerly there were sacred ministers' (Towler and Coxon, 1979, 39). He has become a 'jack of all trades. He occupies a unique position, but the uniqueness of his position has nothing to do with unique skills, or even with unique competence...He does not have a job at all in any sense which is readily understandable today...As a result the clergyman finds himself marginal to society' (op. cit., pp.53—4).

Unfortunately we do not have a major study of Roman Catholic priests in England.and Wales which might provide the basis for a similar analysis. There is no reason to suppose, however, that the findings would be substantially different. Catholic priests appear to be responding to their changing role in the same way as Anglican clergymen. Towler and Coxon describe this as follows:

'The clergy show many signs of trying to escape from their uncomfortable marginality. Some quit the ministry for jobs in teaching or in the welfare services, while others go half way by involving themselves in voluntary organisations such as the Samaritans or by doing a little teaching on the side. Some try to find a specialism peculiar to the clergy in "pastoral psychology" or "clinical theology", or through management training courses. Some renounce their public status altogether and confine their activities to the faithful remnant, retreating to within their local church and its congregation. Very few just stand and, as it were, allow the waves of marginality to break over them...The clergy as specially authorised representatives of the Church have...the role of a prophet...The prophet stands over against society, declaring the judgment of God; he is deeply involved in society and does not seek to escape from it; he is in the world but not of the world' (op.cit., pp.54—5).

Diana Leat on the basis of interviews with a random sample of 30 ministers and priests of various denominations in a large town south of London examined one response of the clergy, regarded 'as a cognitive minority'. This was pastoral counselling, which they saw as a means of 'putting God over...in a modern way'. Although pastoral and secular counsellors described their aims in the same way, she found that 'the acceptance of the principles and means of counselling represents an attempt to adapt and make relevant to the dominant world-view the traditional pastoral aims' (Leat, 1973).

Goldner and his colleagues (1973), who surveyed the priests in a major U.S. diocese in 1970, regarded the crisis in the priesthood as one example of a process of deprofessionalization generally.

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Distinctions of social prestige between all professionals and their clients or lay people have been reduced as a result of the general rise in educational standards, and this has been accompanied by increasing demands for the 'inclusion of the laity' in the control processes of all professions, including medicine and education. In the case of priests the professionalisation of social welfare has resulted in a reduction of the frequency of interactions with the priest. One response, particularly among the younger priests, is that of "interpersonalism" or 'building a Christian Community'. Goldner observes that leadership roles in such interpersonal experiences are more dependent on personal characteristics than professional skills. Again, these are not the exclusive preserve of priests. Even more challenging is the view of these authors that such processes appear 'to represent an anti-institutional movement within Catholicism ... Interpersonalism ... represents, for many, a retreat from unsuccessful efforts to provide a better world by reforming organisations or societies. It is a move outside of the structural, political, power and distributive issues of the world and back to those emotive states involved in interpersonal relations' (Goldner, Ference and Ritti, 1973).

The best analysis of the changing priesthood in this country is that of John Moore. He interprets recent changes in terms of a paradigm shift 'from the sacred and mediatorial paradigm of priesthood to the competing quasi-democratic, secularized paradigms of the present day' (Moore, 31). The process is seen as one 'from ortho*doxy* to ortho*praxis* P. 33) and involves the shift from the sacred model of the priest as someone set apart from the world to a new 'stress on the priesthood as a co-responsible ministry of service' (p. 43).

Both Moore (1975) and Towler and Coxon (1979) explore the implications for seminary training. Clearly the pre-Vatican model of the seminarian who 'scores high on obedience, docility and loyalty to the institutional patterns of the seminary, which reflect the hierarchical arrangements of the encompassing church' (Moore, 50) is inappropriate for the needs of the contemporary parish situation.

It would be quite erroneous to suppose, however, that a changing priesthood implies a decline. Certainly there are difficulties, perhaps elements of a crisis, but there are also indications of a successful adaptation. We may get some clues as to the probable position from the survey of a random sample of 6000 American priests and all the 276 bishops and 208 major religious superiors in the winter of 1969/70. Reviewing the evidence for the U.S. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Greeley reported that 'we have discovered no evidence that the Catholic priesthood is in a state of collapse...There are many strong and positive forces at work in the priesthood...On the other hand, the priesthood has certain very serious problems, most of them centering around the highly volatile subjects of power and sex,

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which indicate trouble and conflict in the years ahead...the priesthood has both more assets and more problems than most other professions' (Greeley, 1972b, 315).

Among the "liabilities" identified, Greeley refers to the systematic and substantial differences between bishops and priests on almost every matter, but especially on the questions of decision-making and the exercise of authority by the bishops and on sexual morality. He also draws attention to the loneliness and discouragement of the priestly life.

It is difficult to say whether or not a similar situation obtains in England and Wales. It is necessary to stress again that there have not been any major research studies here about the ways in which the Church's main source of trained manpower has responded to the challenges of social change generally and the Second Vatican Council in particular. My own guess, on the basis of previous research on members of the bishops' commissions, priests and laity in four parishes, attendance at a wide variety of conferences, committees and the National Pastoral Congress held in Liverpool in 1980, and in general observation, is that ideological cleavages are not horizontal but vertical and generally not very salient. In other words, differences in theological orientation and pastoral practice do not, on the whole, separate bishops from priests or priests from laity. In so far as one can distinguish "traditionalists" and "progressives", the distinction cuts right through the membership of the Church in this country and there are bishops, priests and laity in both camps.

What the parish thinks
It is appropriate at this point to review some of the findings of the 1978 survey in England and Wales in *Roman Catholic Opinion* (Hornsby-Smith and Lee, 1979). First of all, 50% considered that 'ordinary Catholics should have a greater say in the choice of their parish priest' (op. cit., 194) as against 33% who disagreed. Agreement was strongest among the young and those who had not attended Mass in the previous year. The attachment to the local parish can be gauged from the fact that 13% said they belonged to parish organisations (28% of weekly Mass attenders) and two fifths overall (but 72% of weekly Mass attenders said) they would be very or somewhat sorry if they had to leave their parish (op.cit. 202). Over one adult Catholic in four claimed they had had a serious discussion with a priest within the previous two years (two fifths of weekly Mass attenders but only one fifth of the 15—24 age group). Overall one Catholic in six reported attending a house Mass and the same proportion a religious discussion group within the previous two years but only one in eight had attended an ecumenical service in the same period (op.cit, 203).

Several questions explored attitudes towards ministries in the
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Church. Catholics were asked to rate each of eleven aspects of the work of the parochial clergy on four point scales (from excellent to poor.) Between one quarter and one third did not know how to answer these questions, which is, perhaps, one indication of the extent to which Catholics know their priests. Generally, however, Catholics gave their priests fairly high ratings on many aspects of their work. For example 63% overall (and 83% of weekly Mass attenders but only 54% of the 15—24 age group) rated their priests excellent or good on 'the way in general that they do their job'. Office holders in parish organisations were more favourably disposed towards their priests than ordinary members, who in turn were more favourably disposed than non-members (op. cit.,191). It is not clear, though, whether those who were office holders rated priests more highly because of their closer contact with them or whether those who, perhaps as a result of previous disagreement with a priest, had low valuations of priests moved to the periphery of the institutional life of the Church. Finally it is worth noting that only one half of weekly Mass attenders 'considered their priests excellent or good on parish visiting or on their understanding of personal problems or the problems of married people' (op. cit., 71).

It is also important to note the levels of acceptance by Catholics of various potential alternative forms of ministry, especially in the light of the general ageing of the population of priests and the decline in priestly vocations in recent years[15].

> 'The results...illustrate how attached to a single model of ministry many Catholics are. For alternatives which provide no apparent challenge to the traditional model of the priest there is strong support...Catholics are split two to one in favour of married priests...and only two to one against women priests...On the use of part-time priests...and married ex-priests as part-time priests...Catholics are equally divided' (op.cit., 71).

Two fifths of Catholics thought the Church too hard on men who left the priesthood to marry. One quarter of recent Mass attenders and older Catholics

> 'stressed the notion that such men were breaking a contract freely entered upon, and that they were letting down the Church which must be firm in its response. Young Catholics and those who had not attended Mass within the past year were far more likely to be sympathetic and lenient towards what was seen to be natural' (op. cit., 56). When the work of the nun in the local community was considered there was 'overwhelming support for the known and traditional supportive model of the nun, ministering to the sick...teaching religious education...and working as a volunteer in the housing or social services fields...Catholics approved of nuns distributing Communion at

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Mass in the ratio of two to one...but (there was a) deep suspicion of political involvement...(evident) in the more divided responses on local community politics...Finally a majority of Catholics, and especially men, approved the playing by women of a further part in the life of the Church...' (op.cit., 71).

On the whole the findings from this national survey of Roman Catholics in this country indicate that priests are favourably rated. It is worth suggesting, however, that the findings reflect in large measure an adaptable laity successfuly socialised into a passive, docile unquestioning subordinate role. It seems that Catholics like things as they are. They do not particularly yearn for change but on the other hand they have generally approved of the changes there have been in recent years, particularly those involving liturgy. On the whole, however, Catholics want a quiet life. In this context it can be argued more critically that there has been considerable resistance to the implementation of the reforms emanating from the Second Vatican Council. In the last analysis the parish priest has an important gatekeeper role; he can initiate change or he can, through his substantial power of control over information sources at the parish level, effectively prevent not only change but also any knowledge that change might be the norm and that reforms have been urged by official teachers in the Church for fifteen years. Such an interpretation is entirely consistent with the attitudes Catholics expressed towards their priests and also with their attitudes to recent changes in the Church.

Thus *Roman Catholic Opinion* reported that 'there is little evidence...of a yearning for a more prophetic, witnessing or challenging Church' (op. cit., 73). Only one half of Catholics had heard of the Second Vatican Council and the proportion was only 30% of the youngest age group. One in four of weekly Mass attenders and one member of a parish organisation in ten had not heard of the Council.

'This astonishing finding thirteen years after the end of the Council lends support to recent research (Hornsby-Smith, Lee and Reilly, 1977) which had suggested that Catholics evaluated recent changes in the Church at the experiential level and that there was little awareness of any ideological implications in the conciliar teaching. Rather more Catholics consider there have been too few changes than too many but this very largely reflects the views of those who are not regular Mass attenders. A majority of weekly Mass attenders is happy with the recent changes and of the remainder, more think there have been too many changes than too few, another indication of the essentially conservative religion of many Catholics. Attitudes to recent liturgical changes indicate a fair measure of support, in

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> particular for the saying of the Mass in English...and for the "handshake of peace"...Catholics also largely approved of folk Masses...and receiving Communion under both kinds...There is also strong support for non-Catholics receiving Communion at Mass...though respondents were more equally divided on the decline of more traditional devotions...The opposition or suspicion of many Catholics to the reduction of clerical or religious status differences when compared to the laity is again apparent...' (op. cit., 74)

in the fact that in 1978 only one quarter of Catholics approved of lay ministers of Communion at Mass and under one half approved of nuns wearing lay clothes instead of habits. On the other hand

> 'Catholics overwhelmingly consider that the need for Christian Unity is important though it remains to explore the reasons for this in more detail and in further research. It is, for example, possible that the figures confuse theologically derived reasons on the part of the more active Catholics and a general desire for more flexibility and convenience on the part of many other Catholics' (op. cit., 74).

Parish and priest in the future

In the analysis of the supposed crisis in the priesthood which I have supplied here the suggestion has been made that in the United States a number of "assets" prevented a major collapse. I have also argued that a crisis has largely been avoided in England and Wales because of the predominantly passive and conformist docility of the laity, who, by and large, appear to be prepared to accept whatever style of leadership is offered them without much protest.

It may be, though, that the situation is changing. Certainly the theology of the "People of God" as expressed at the National Pastoral Congress (Anon, 1981, 112—136) was unambiguously post-Vatican in its orientation. The community and servant images of the parish were strongly emphasized (op. cit., A 6—16) and wider concepts of lay ministries mentioned in the same context as ordained ministries (op. cit. B.5—15). The importance of rethinking the role of women in the Church was also firmly stressed (op. cit., B. 19—20). All sectors urged the importance of adult religious formation and Sector D emphasized the importance of parish liturgical styles and community life to reduce religious alienation and barriers to the lapsed. The role of parish catechesis was given strong support (op. cit. E, 19—25), and the grass roots generation of awareness of the issues of justice and peace was implied in the powerful appeal of Sector G. For Michael Hollings the priest must learn to be listener, counsellor and healer and 'all things to all men all the time' (Hollings, 1977, Chs 4 & 5). Joseph Lange sees the priest as spiritual leader in parish

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renewal (Lange, 1979) and Brian O'Sullivan stresses the importance of lay support structures for the parish priest (O'Sullivan, 1979).

A full analysis of the changing parish remains to be written. Joan Brothers first pointed to the implications for the parish of the expansion of educational provision in the 1960s (Brothers, 1964). Our own study of four Catholic parishes in the mid-1970s suggests considerable social change since the pre-war days, though strenuous attempts to "build communities" are common. Charismatic prayer groups, house Masses, neighbourhood groups, healing teams and so on are all attempts to adapt to a new social world with its new needs and new problems. What seems to be clear is that the priest of tomorrow will be unable to rely solely on the formal definition of his role and the authority due simply to his position in the organisational hierarchy but will increasingly be expected to manifest leadership skills as the religious initiator, sustainer and motivator of members of small groups clustered around the parish community. The implication is that a new type of person will need to be attracted for this form of ministry and there will be a need to modify educational and training programmes in order to develop the new skills which will be needed in the parishes over the next few decades. At a time of rapid social change it is also obvious that a continuous and systematic programme of in-service professional training will be essential. It is inconceivable that this can continue to be done in isolation from lay people. Priests are the Church's major resource of manpower and the indications are that their numbers will decline rapidly over the next few decades (Cherwell Report, 1979). What is clear is that their role will change and this change cannot be dissociated from the developing theology of the Church, a changing laity with new needs and problems and the changing nature of the parish institution. In order to promote the development of this key role, a stronger research base in this country is necessary.

Two further observations seem appropriate. First, there seems to be a need to develop the concept of ministry in the social context so that the priestly ministry comes increasingly to be viewed as one ministry among many. The scriptural basis for this view seems to be strong (e.g. in 1 Cor. 12) but its social implications in terms of parish renewal have hardly begun to be considered. Secondly, it is important to stress again the enormous power for social control which the parish priest has in terms of inhibiting or legitimating various lay initiatives. Given the long socialisation which the laity have had in a subordinate and deferential role, much of the initiative for retraining the laity to active participation in their missionary activities as "People of God" must inevitably reside with the parish clergy. If the renewal called for by the Second Vatican Council is to be achieved it is essential not only that priests take up the challenge but also that they do not cling to a
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style of authority relations appropriate for the static pre-Vatican Church but inappropriate for the dynamic post-Vatican Church, and that they are not allowed the power to inhibit pastoral initiatives whether of bishop or of lay people.

1   This article is a revised and slightly shortened version of the paper to the National Conference of Priests at Newman College, Birmingham, on 2nd September, 1980.
2   For further discussion of this theme see Hornsby-Smith and Mansfield (1974) and Ch. 2 in Hornsby-Smith and Lee (1979).
3   Hornsby-Smith (1980b).
4   Hornsby-Smith (1979).
5   Jackson (1963).
6   See, e.g. Hickey (1967), Rex and Moore (1967) and Ward (1961).
7   Thus up to about 1960 only about 30% of married Catholics were in mixed marriages and 10% in canonically invalid marriages; see Hornsby-Smith and Lee (1979). On the concept of stigma see Goffman (1968).
8   On the growth of the Catholic education system in the post war years see Hornsby-Smith (1978).
9   See, e.g. Abbott (1966).
10 Hornsby-Smith and Lee (1979, Section 2. 4).
11 See also the discussion of "The Sharing Church" in *The Easter People* (Anon, 1981, 307—328).
12 Some have argued that Pope John Paul II regards the years since the Second Vatican Council as a transitional period of instability and that it is now time to stop experimentation and the 'perpetual and anarchic re-examination of all questions' (Whale, 1980, 258). This view would suggest that a shift back to a more mechanistic system is likely.
13 The sociological distinction between priests and prophets derives from Max Weber. Priests were regarded as specialised, professional functionaries who claimed authority by virtue of their service in a sacred tradition. In contrast the claim of the prophet who proclaimed a religious teaching was considered to be based solely on his personal revelation and charisma (M. Weber, 1966).
14 It could perhaps be argued that just as the modern family has possibly lost some functions but gained others and also been expected to achieve far higher standards than previously, so with social change and the emergence of the "caring" professions, the priest has lost some functions, gained new ones, and is required to achieve higher standards than previously (e.g. in liturgical celebration and the promotion of a sense of "community").
15 See, e.g., Cherwell Report (1979); M. Winter (1979). It should be noted that support for both married priests and women priests was even stronger among both priest and lay delegates to the National Pastoral Congress; Hornsby-Smith and Cordingley (1983, 44).

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