TRANSFORMATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY ROMAN CATHOLICISM:

A CASE STUDY

BY

THEODORE KOOPMANSCHAP

Thesis presented for the Degree of Ph.D.

June 1978

Department of Sociology
University of Liverpool

IMAGING SERVICES NORTH
Boston Spa, Wetherby
West Yorkshire, LS23 7BQ
www.bl.uk

DAMAGED PAGES UNABLE TO REMOVE PEN MARKS IN ORIGINAL

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I	INTRODUCTION	p. 2
	1. Nature and scope of the inquiry	p. 2
	2. Specific research concerns	p. 7
	3. New metaphors of the sacred	p.14
	4. Some ethical implications	p.17 - 20
	5. Some liturgical implications	p.21
CHAPTER II	CONCEPTUALIZATIONS	p.29
	1. Methodological considerations	p.29
	2. Conceptual model: Religion as a form of bricolage	p.39
CHAPTER III	THE SOCIAL SETTING	p.50
	1. Historical and social background of the Formby community	p.50
	2. Some characteristics of the contemporary social context	p.57
	3. The parish of St. Jerome's as a socio-religious institution	p.65
	4. The social significance of Mass attendance	70
CHAPTER IV	TRANSFORMATIONS OF BELIEF	p.74
	1. Introductory remarks	p.74
	2. Beliefs about the Fatherhood of God	p.80
	3. Beliefs about the Divinity of Christ	p.86
	4. Beliefs on the Resurrection and Death of Christ	p.94
	5. Beliefs in the After-life	p.96
	6. Beliefs on Heaven and Hell	p.97
	7. Further beliefs on Heaven and Hell	p.103
CHAPTER V	AUTHORITY STRUCTURE AND MORAL IMAGES	p.106
	1. The connection of beliefs and values	p.106
	2. Some value-parameters	p.110
	3. Attitudes to the new image of the Church	p.115
	4. Attitudes to ecumenism	p.121
	5. Attitudes to the parish community as the image of the People of God	p.128

CONTENTS

	6. Attitudes to Catholic education	p.131
	7. General attitudes to the priesthood	p.135
	8. Attitudes to clerical celibacy	p.140
	9. Attitudes to women being ordained to the priesthood	p.144
	10. Attitudes to birth-control	p.147
	11. Attitudes to abortion	p.150
	12. Attitudes to divorce and re-marriage	p.153
	13. Attitudes to sin and salvation	p.163
	14. Conclusions	p.166
CHAPTER VI	LITURGY AND THE PEOPLE	p.168
	1. General considerations	p.168
	2. General attitudes and views on the Mass	p.176
	3. Mass attendance	p.178
	4. The meaning of the New Mass	p.184
	5. From sign to symbol	p.193
	6. Attitudes to prayer	p.206
	7. The meaning of some other related ritual symbols	p.210
	8. Conclusion	p.223
CHAPTER VII	CONCLUSIONS	p.223
	1. Transformations in the quest for community	p.224
	2. Transformations in the belief-system	p.226
	3. Transformations in the moral dimension	p.228
	4. Transformations in the liturgical dimension	p.231
APPENDIX I	The Method of Research	p.238
APPENDIX II	Interview Schedule	p.243
BIBLIOGRAPHY		p.247

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Nature and scope of the inquiry

This study reports the findings of research undertaken by the author in a Roman Catholic parish in Formby, a predominantly middle class community. The parish of St. Jerome's where the fieldwork was carried out is situated in a new housing estate and was established in 1968 to cater for the Catholic overspill from Liverpool and neighbouring suburbs. The majority of its parishioners represents the position of the growing "new middle class" having experienced social mobility as a result of the general expansion of educational opportunities and occupational achievements in the post-war years[1]. The parish can, therefore, be regarded as the proto-type of a surburban parish looking after the spiritual welfare of mainly socially mobile Catholics who have come to settle in Formby in increasing numbers from the early 60s onwards. Making a distinction between institutional and individual beliefs and values, the study was not intended to measure transformations within the Catholic belief and value system itself, but to tap and assess on the basis of a qualitative analysis the religious attitudes, beliefs and practices of these mobile Catholics in a situation of social and religious change. The study was also intended to explore their attitudes to some of the institutional changes taking place in the field of ritual.

---

1. Dr. J. Brothers, Church and School - A study of the Impact of Education on Religion, Liverpool UP, 1964. An account of further changes in the rate of upward mobility among Catholics is given by J.G.Bode, 'Status & Mobility of Catholics Vis a Vis Several Protestant Denominations,' Socio. Quarterly II (1) 1970, pp. 103-111. More up to date information on the shifting nature of social cohesion in the English Catholic Body is to be found in M.P. Hornsby - Smith & M.C. Mansfield, 'English Catholicism in change', The Newman, 7 (3), September 1974, pp. 62-70.

The major frame of reference is neither that of Liverpool-based Catholicism as such, nor that of social class as such, but rather that of suburban middle class Catholicism as an expression of further differentiation in cultural Catholicism[2]. It is at this point useful to point out how much and how little is here embraced by the term 'cultural Catholicism'. Without getting embroiled in abstract discussions about the distinction between religion and culture, the view adapted here is that proposed by T.S. Eliot.

It is important, Eliot insists, to avoid two alternative errors which have made their way in anthropology and sociology: "that of regarding religion and culture as two separate things between which there is a relation, and that of identifying religion and culture..." but instead one should speak of "the culture of a people as an incarnation of its religion", for the truth, partial truth, or falsity of a religion "neither consists in the cultural achievements of the people professing their religion, nor submits to being exactly tested by them".[3]

Taking this point of view, the author proposed to examine the group's responses to their religion as a cultural system and saw his task as delineating the morphology of the religious institution with which they are familar and investigating it in the context of suburban society, and as describing also the nature of the prevalent religious symbolism by relating it to the social relations and conditions which are current in the community. This way of looking at religious phenomena imposed a restriction. For the inquiry did not aim at discovering what religion is in itself but rather finding out what it means to the group. Whatever the source of religious faith may be or however faith operates in individuals and groups, it is beyond doubt that it is expressed in symbols and social arrangements.

---

2. The principal findings were obtained by a combination of research strategies an account of which is given in Appendix I, The Method of Research.

3. T.S. Eliot, Notes towards the Definition of Culture, Faber & Faber, London, 1962, p.33.

Whether meanings are pre-existing in some Platonic heaven or come into being in the intersubjective world, it is again obvious that religious symbols, linguistic and otherwise, are purveyors of meaning without ever fully expressing the potentiality of meaning structures. Thus asking what religion means to people in a given social context is not equivalent to saying what religion in essence is. Their description is at best a model.

Bearing these points in mind, it should be stated at once that this line of approach is not some arbitrary decision on the part of the author but derives its motivation from the crisis of meaning in the Church itself in its confrontation with the modern world. It can be asserted that the whole question of meaning has come to the forefront in western society today. Personal and academic concern with the problems which changes generate within societies and groups is or ought to be guided by what people themselves think and feel about such problems.

Ready made generalisations are rarely illuminating because they speak about people in stereotypes and leave out precisely the concrete factors that go into the making of choice and orientation. We know very little about the ways in which the crisis of meaning in the Church has affected people's sensibilities. It is of some importance to say a little more about this lacuna in our knowledge.

While many of the changes introduced by the Second Vatican Council (1962-5) especially in the field of ritual have been universally accepted in the Catholic

body, there has been little detailed analysis of the impact it made on the everday life of Catholics in spite of the fact that the Council has been regarded as the most dramatic event in the history of the Roman Catholic Church. Many books have been written to explain what the Council did and why it proposed a programme of reform and renewal. These books were mostly written by theologians and contain little information about the consequences of the proposed reforms as they were mainly dealing with them from an ideological position built into the theological enterprise itself. Although professional theology has become increasingly diversified over the last ten years or so by recognizing the claims of psychology and sociology it cannot be said that theology even if it has woken up to the possibilities of ideological influences and is conceiving of its task as that of liberating God's word from ideology, has thrown much light on what precisely has happened to Catholics who belong to specific socio-religious groupings.[4]

It is ironic that in an age in which the layman has been restored to his legitimate place as a member of the 'People of God', so little is known about his attitudes and reactions to the reforms. Indeed, it is almost impossible to describe the differences of attitudes, outlook and emotions which are expressed by the terms 'pre-conciliar' and 'post-conciliar' with their numerous connotations among vast sections of the Catholic population.

---

4. The theologian, Gregory Baum, holds that the task of theology is to stop religious faith declining into ideology. 'The Cardinal Bea Memorial Lecture,' in The Month, June 1972.

While structural changes in contemporary religion have received a good deal of attention from scholars working in the comparative study of religion, the study of the relationship of the individual and his group within religion itself has lagged behind. However, the upheaval in the Roman Catholic Church has brought about a shift away from regarding the Church as a supra-national organisation to experiencing it as a cultural phenomenon in its own right. Furthermore, one of the side-effects of this upheaval is that Vatican II by legitimating dialogue among its members heightened individual consciousness as well and alerted individuals to the conflicts both at the ideational level of the Church viewed as an international organization, and that of groups. As a result, the term ' Catholic ' may well have lost something of its static institutional image. It is more than likely that this term will vary with wider associational, societal and cultural contexts.[5] In addition, while official Catholicism before Vatican II defined itself with respect to a given orthodoxy known for its regidity, the situation has changed since the Council has embarked on redefining its orthodoxy especially in the field of ritual. Given this change in the Church itself and that institutional analysis of these macro changes remains an essential task for the sociologist of religion, the religious crisis demands that analyses in terms of groups and group-symbols are urgently called for. It is surprising that some leading scholars in socio-religious research have shown concern with attitudes of individuals in their study of religious change and have neglected the dialectical relationship of the individual and the group to which he belongs.

The American sociologists, C. Glock and R. Stark, for example, while making a distinction between religion as a stable property of groups and religion as an

---

5. An example of how American students define themselves as Catholic is provided in J.N. Kotre, The View From the Border: A Social - Psychological Study of current Catholicism, Gill & Macmillan LTD, 1971, p. 176.

aspect of individual behaviour have concentrated on individual commitment and involvement without paying much attention to the factors involved in group behaviour.[6] This approach removes the individual from the cultural system in which he is directly involved. Admittedly, formal membership groups are on the wane in complex societies but even in such societies people have no direct contact with their religion except through the values and symbols of their tradition on the one hand and those of the group on the other. Religious symbols, to be sure, are neither purely autonomous inhabiting a world of their own nor purely contingent but bear the impring of a historical and social tradition in which different interest groups have a stake. Yet the same scholars although they include 'symbols' as the first component of their definition of religion say very little about them and fail to give a convincing picture in their work of how symbolic behaviour in the three great American faiths is tied up with their evolving traditions in the face of modernity and adaptation.[7]

---

6. C. Glock & R. Stark, Religion and Society in Tension, McNally, Chicago, 1965, pp.18-38.

7. Op.cit., p.4
It is worth quoting here Gerhard Lenski's reflections on the transformatic of American religion with special reference to Protestants and Catholics: "I am inclined to think that such differences as existed between Catholics and Protestants a decade ago have been seriously eroded... Thus, The Religious Factor is, at best, a picture of an era that has ended.." in American Sociological Review (36), February, 1971, pp. 48-50.

Specific research concerns

The study aimed to explore the consequences of several factors likely to have significant implications for the Roman Catholic Community considered as a whole but in particular for those Catholics who have experienced mobility - taking the latter term to include not only social but also spatial and cognitive mobility. First, it was anticipated that mobility was likely to have had effects on the nature of the relationship between parochial clergy and laity, and on the meanings they attributed to the Vatican Council's new concept of the "People of God" with its emphasis on their common baptism and their active participation in the organizational and sacramental life of the Church. Considering that one of the central problems in contemporary Catholicism is one of achieving a sense of community at local levels it was thought that an examination of the socio-cultural conditions in which the group live would be of help in seeing what structures are likely to be relevant to the building up of a parish community.

Secondly, it was thought that the contemporary problems of authority viewed as a general phenomenon in society would affect the group's attitudes to Church authority and clerical leadership in the sphere of the sacred since the notions of the sacred and the political are part of the system of representation in organized religion. As Vatican II has shown - at least in principle - a desire to update some parts of its institutional life it was thought likely that Vatican reforms would have consequences on the group's perceptions and images of the Church.

Thirdly, because change in any institution invariably involves tensions and conflicts on the part of its members, it was anticipated that there would be indications of the extent to which these conflicts would reveal themselves in the

Catholic Community. Specifically, these conflicts were expected to appear over the approach of Catholics to the ecumenical movement, their reception of changes in the liturgy of the Mass, and the reiteration of the traditional view-points on birth control, abortion, divorce, re-marriage and some other related moral issues. At the start of this study the author was interested to find out whether the tensions would manifest themselves more on the question of the interpretation and exercise of ecclesiastical authority than on the specific issues themselves. This would enable him - it was hoped - to discover to what extent both secular and religious concepts of authority, come together in the various interpretations offered by the group. This finding would throw light on the possibility of alternative interpretations in contemporary Catholic faith and perhaps indicate to what extent such positions have been solidified over time and what their chances of survival are in suburban culture. The question implicit in this formulation was related to one raised by sociologists who believe that where conflicts are situated at the level of concrete values, a plurality of conflicting views will in the end lead those who hold them to alienation from the institutional framework.[1]

---

1. F. Houtart, 'Conflicts of Authority in The Roman Catholic Church', Social Compass, 16, (3), 1969, pp. 309-325.

Furthermore, since the connection between beliefs and practices is a subject of continuing dispute among students of religion and within religion itself, it was thought appropriate te examine what sorts of probable relationships obtained between them in the views of the group. Sociologists and anthropologists have always been led to hold that a religion must consist of a set of beliefs and practices which form a coherent and systematic whole in which cognitive beliefs take a logical priority in the shaping of religious behaviour.[2] While there is a point in looking at religion in this way in the case of Catholicism, the author assumed that the current religious symbols in so far as they are related to doctrinal beliefs (for example, the Apostles Creed) need not necessarily hang together as a kind of coherent whole. However, taking our clues from post-conciliar developments it is significant that the centre of attention has shifted in the Church itself from the belief dimension to that of the ritual. It is worth pointing out in this connection that the Vatican Council did not reiterate in full force doctrinal orthodoxy in its desire to seek a dialogue with the other Christian Churches. It may be the case that religion in industrial society is becoming, cognitively speaking, more and more vacuous and is increasingly confined to providing a nebulous background of meaning separated from its value-system and to furnishing Christians with a language for the expression and evocation of thoughts and feelings which has little reference to its doctrinal content. Speculation apart, it was decided to have a close look at the supposed interconnected dimensions of belief and values and to discover in what ways the former shape the latter or the other way round in the interpretations of the group.

But underlying these specific aims was a more central concern, namely, that of discovering the attitudes of this group to the idea of the sacred, which is fundamental to organised religion, against the background of competing views of secularization which are currently available both inside and outside the Church.

2. For a criticism of this view, see P. Worsley, The Trumpet Shall Sound, Paladin, 1970, pp. 300-301.

The author believed that an examination of the group's attitudes to the sacred would throw some light on the process of secularization in the middle class community. It is quite possible that in celebrating or bemoaning the absence of an integral sense of the sacred we may easily overlook its persistence in unexpected quarters. However, the debate on secularization has been persued so far along two principal lines within the Church.

There is, first, what may be called the internal approach which since Vatican II has gained momentum among the laity - an attempt to review and restate the Church's teachings, sacraments, devotions, life styles and participatory behaviour in terms of their secular significance. Emphasis in this perspective has been placed on demythologizing scripture and beliefs and on desacralising ritual. This approach favours a reduction of the 'mystery cult' in the service of the Church; it rejects the Tridentine theology of the sacred as localised in persons, places and objects and welcomes the changes that symbolise and evoke the view of the Church as a 'sacred community'. The traditional division between sacred and profane things, places, times festivals and so on is rejected to give place to the idea of bringing the common and the holy together. This trend suggests a breaking out of the sacred - profane dichotomy. Vatican II gave some support to this approach in asserting that since the Incarnation nothing and no one can be 'purely secular' anymore (On The Church, art. 22)[3]. Likewise it gave some basis to the idea that the sacred is simply the secular but seen in the light of God, when it encourages lay people to express their faith continually 'in the framework of secular life' (ibid., art. 35).

---

3. Quotations from conciliar documents promulgated by Vatican II are taken from The Documents of Vatican II, eds. W.M. Abbot and J. Gallagher, Geoffrey Chapman, London 1966.

This drive to mingle the sacred and the profane also means that the source of the sacred instead of being located in some supernatural power or force is transferred to the collectivity. One of the claims in this approach is that the Judaeo - Christian religion, far from being the enemy of secularization, was in fact its prime cause on the grounds that original Christianity like Judaism did not separate the sacred from the secular but fused the two into a single world - view and way of life. The Church - these secularizers claim - is only doing its job in drawing the faithful away from too much literal - mindedness with regard to its doctrine and practices. Those Catholics who support this stance argue that the Roman Catholic Church is merely catching up with the Protestant Reformers in liberating the Word of God from superstitious accretions which over a period of time have grown up round the sacraments.

And if the idea of the sacred as a fixed category has to go, it may well be that the idea of a sacred place or day must go as well. The Church at any rate allows Catholics to attend Saturday evening Mass in some countries and has, therefore, thrown doubt on the obligation of attending Mass on Sunday.

Coupled with this approach is also the view that the modern world is gradually deprived of its sacred character as modern man and his surroundings are becoming the object of rational - causal explanation and manipulation so that the culmination of secularization would be a kind of rational world society in which the element of the supernatural has little part to play in mundane activities. Influential in this respect has been Weber's concept of 'disenchantment' (Entzauberung) signifying the irreversible trend of rationalization which is usually associated with the process of urbanization and industrialization in advanced societies.[4]

---

4. Weber, From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, (ed.) H. Gerth and C.W. Mills. London: Routledge. (First published 1906), p.139.

This form of disenchantment has been redefined by Catholics as 'de-mystification' of the traditional Mass and it is widely believed that this is an inevitable consequence of Vatican II in attempting to accommodate its doctrines and practices to modern exigencies. Weber's concept of charisma, also found its way among post-conciliar Catholics in a new disguise. As is known, Weber used the concept of charisma to delineate a major source of human activity and social change without transforming it into a metaphysical quality. If he saw it as a quality attached to leaders, he also regarded it as a group - function.

The new charismatic movement[5] now under way in the Church has seized upon this notion of charisma in a double sense: it seeks to detach charisma as an ecclesiastical group function from the leaders and to transfer it to lay groups on the plea that the Holy Spirit "roams about" freely in individuals, and at the same time it seeks to personalise the gifts of the Holy Spirit within informal groupings in the belief that informal leadership avoids the tangible shapes of coercion.

The second approach to secularization hangs on to the old theology of the sacred as something condensed in persons and places which in a privileged way is held to give access to the divine in clear ways. Thus the priest will be regarded as a 'holy man' set apart and having in him a spark of the divine itself. The attempt to give 'salvation' a secular dimension and to interpret it in terms of social and political liberation appears to those who stick to their guns as a travesty of everything the Church stands for. The period of change has been a source of acute embarassement especially for traditionalists, because they find it hard to accept that the Church is readjusting its institutional and sacramental system to modern needs.

---

5. Catholic Pentecostalism is strong in the USA but has an appeal also to English Catholics, see E. O'Connor, The Pentecostal Movement in the Catholic Church, Notre Dame University, 1971.

The polarization described here is oversimplified since there is so little information on what the sacred means to people in their everyday life. The distinction between 'modernists' and 'traditionalists' which made some sense during the early part of the post - conciliar period has become obscure since then because of new proliferations of positions so that it is more difficult to know what is happening to a particular tradition than it was ten years ago.

But whatever has happened, many conflicts in the Church today seem to arise from a clash of models manipulated by interest groups.[6] Institutions are slow to overhaul their structures and tend to hang together in their parts even if some parts are seen as dysfunctional. So change in one of their functions will not lead directly to an immediate corresponding change of the whole symbolic structure. While it is possible and desirable to change power relationships in an institution, a great deal of the symbols validating those relationships are bound to survive and will only change slowly over time. One of the ambiguities experienced in the post-conciliar period is that reforms can only be effected through continuities.

It will be helpful at this point to provide a bird's eye view of some of the ingredients which have found their way into the new representations of the sacred as they have emanated from the Vatican II in order to give substance to the responses of the group. For a sociological understanding postulates some measure of pre-understanding in communicative acts, and the meanings produced by the people during interviewing cannot simply be grasped in terms of the words they speak any more than they can be transcribed within the framework of theology or the common sense culture that pays little attention to context - dependence. Though the majority of ordinary Catholics may not have read the conciliar documents in which new orientations have been formulated,

---

6. P.G. McCaffery, 'A Sciological Analysis of the concerns of pressure-groups in the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands and in England', Acts of the 12th Conference on the Sociology of Religion, Lille: CISR Secretariat, 1973, pp. 239 - 56.

they have, neverthless, become increasingly aware of their theological impact on their lives.

New Metaphors of the Sacred:

There is, first, the image of the Church as the 'People of God' including the entire Christian community with emphasis upon the general priesthood of all believers as constituted by their baptism and confirmation. Though the notion of the Church as a 'mystery' is retained, it is somewhat muted, as the reality of the Church is seen to reside in the People of God. The Council departed from seeing itself as the Mystical Body of Christ co-terminous with the Roman Church, for it did not make the Body its commanding image but instead balanced it with metaphors of growth and development, and above all with the model of real people. Clearly discernible in this shift is an attempt to establish homologies between institutional and social conditions. The new metaphor shows that the reality of the Church has not yet come into existence, but it is only a partial realization of the Kingdom of Christ, and not yet the Kingdom itself.

This reformation conceded that the Church as institution is a much 'preceding' its members as being continually 'made' by them as a 'community'. For saying that the Church is to be identified with the People of God can only mean that it is involved with real people, with all the cultural diversity, turbulence, pressures, uncertainties and conflicts that go with people on the march. Moreover, the partial abandonment of the image of the Body, which presupposes a functional view of social and sacral relationships within the body corporate, was played down in order to bring out more clearly the principle of equality, for in theory at least everyone is equal, pope, bishop, priest and layman. In this sense the layman is as much

consecrated as the ordained priest as he shares the universal priesthood of Christ as well. This shift is of great anthropological significance. As social anthropologists have pointed out, the metaphorical use of concepts associated with the physical human body to indicate some form or aggregates of social relations is a fairly well attested ethnographic phenomenon. Mary Douglas, for example, has emphasised[1] the argument of Marcel Mauss, that the 'social body' constrains the way the physical body is perceived and experienced in human societies. Consider in this context that one of the chief symbols of Christianity is that of the Body and Blood of Christ round which all the other symbolic expressions and actions are grouped as so many precious stones round a diamond. Thus the Council set in motion a process against traditional monolithic structures which, once started, the official authorities were unable to halt and control. As the Council asserted, the idea of the people of God is to be represented in the local community as a true image of the Universal Church in its own right. The implications of this shift were not likely to be lost on the faithful once the local parishes began to digest the meaning of the Council. Where for example, does the ordinary man in the street come in? To what extent are the local people going to share in the power structures? At what point are they going to share in the universal priesthood of Christ? Furthermore, if the People of God includes all Christians, what sort of attitudes are they going to take to ecumenism without feeling that the distinctiveness of their Church has gone down the drain? Such questions were hotly discussed at first and were answered with varying degrees of success and failure. At any rate the new metaphor did not spell out in detail how it was to be expressed and organized in practice and obscured the real issue at stake. For underlying the conflicting views on how the local communities should accommodate themselves to the ideal of a horizontal Church lay the ensuing ambiguity of the sacred dimension being separated from its traditional metaphors.

---

1. Mary Douglas, Natural Symbols; Pelican, 1973, p.93.

Oddly enough, while the whole thrust was directed to restoring the parish community as the mirror of what the Church ought to mean, it was discovered that the Council did not have much to offer in the way of a theology of the parish. It must be remembered that the parish is an ecclesiastical institution which emerged in history. Being of human origin, it is conditioned by historical and social factors and could be radically altered, were this called for. Paradoxically, it turned out that the image of the horizontal Church had no locale to insert itself because no theological attempt was made to come to grips with the sociological reality of the parish. The fact is that the constitution On the Church did not take the local church as its starting point, because the word 'Church' is used in the Constitution chiefly of the gathering together of all the faithful under the leadership of the bishops in communion with the Bishop of Rome. There is only a brief passage devoted to the local church (On the Church, art. 26) which was inserted as a result of an intervention by a Council Father[2]. Also the sociologist, J. Fichter,[3] discussing the nostalgia expressed in the ideal of the 'restoration of community' shows on the basis of extensive research the impracticality of this ideal in the present changes of industrial society.

Given this confusion, it was decided to elicit the views of the group, first, about the social relevance of the parish, and, secondly, on its probable relationship to the concept of the People of God.

---

2. See on this point, P.Hebblethwaite, Theology of the Church, Clergy Book Service, no. 8, Wisconsin, 1969, p.17.

3. J. H. Fichter, 'The parish and social integration', Social Compass, i, 1960, p. 40

Some ethical implications

Connected with the challenge to provide Catholics with a new collective representation of the Church under the image of the 'People of God' is the question of democratic values and personal responsibility in the sphere of morality. It was on the cards that once cultural diversity and local autonomy were proposed as desirable ends, the question would arise what degree of moral responsibility could be accorded to individuals and groups. It was another consequence of the Council's decision to make the 'People of God' the foundation stone in the building up of the Christian community as the Pilgrim Church. The conciliar document has sounded a hopeful note in that it presented the Church as a new humanism. For a start, the Council affirmed unequivocally the dignity of the moral conscience and reverence for the human person. "Conscience", it declared, "is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his depths"[1]. Taking full note of the quest for freedom in the modern world. it says : "Thus we are witnesses of the birth of a new humanism, one in which man is defined first of all by his responsibilities toward his brothers and toward history" (ibid;art. 55.). Hence the slogan of active participation in decision-making at organizational levels was joined by that of'co-responsibility'. The latter became in the early 60's a clarion-call to move away from the prevalent ethic of constraint to the new philosophy of self-realization.[2] This raised the important question: how can an ethic

---

1. Documents of Vatican II The Church Today Art.16.

2. Gregory Baum attempts to justify the approach to self-realization within the new developments in Catholic theology and a psychologically oriented phenomenology in Man Becoming, Herder & Herder, New York, 1971, ch.V.

of self-realization be reconciled with the principles of authoritarian morality? The source and locus of morality, mediated by an authoritarian Church, has been for centuries a moral God who is the principle and foundation for an ethics of prohibition and condemnation, punishment and reward.

Looking at the history of the now moribund debate on the 'death of God' in contemporary Christianity, it should be pointed out that this theme has been dominantly concerned with intellectual issues rather than with political problems embedded in the structures of plural life-worlds which have accompanied further processes of social differentiation in capitalist societies. While many scholars have made much of the death of cognitive beliefs in God to account for the decline of religious faith, they have perhaps underestimated the attendant phenomenon of the death of the moral God of Christianity as the result of the lack of connection between theistic belief and modern moral beliefs perceived by large numbers of ordinary Christians. The new attempts to regard God not as a Super-person or an outsider but as the ground of immanence in terms of 'ultimate concern' which in effect makes no more of God than an interest and projection of human nature have increasingly emptied religious vocabularies of belief - content. It might be argued that Christian theism has lost the morality which it logically presupposed as it has been drawn in to the arena of competing value systems with their demands on the loyalties of those who participate in them[3]. The response to this situation has produced conflicting moral tendencies amongst Catholics. Some retreated into a closed orthodoxy as in the case of traditionally minded Catholics, who fear the undermining of moral values ;

---

3. A stimulating argument on this issue is to be found in Alasdair.MacIntyre & Paul Ricoeur, The Religious Significance of Atheism, Columbia University Press 1969. Similar problems and issues for sociological research were tackled in The Culture of Unbelief, Eds. R. Caporale & A. Grumelli, University of California Press, London. 1971.

others embraced choice based on social and cultural criteria stemming for the most part from life styles.

Given the long tradition in the Catholic Church where morality especially in the field of sexual conduct was imbued with deep convictions of sacrality, it is not altogether surprising that the further loosening of the twin bonds of religion and morality produced many ambiguities in Catholic attitudes which have largely remained unresolved in spite of the "new spring". Yet, while most Catholics in the post-conciliar period came to recognize that some ethical problems such as over-population, enviromental pollution, drugs, race and poverty, political involvement in radical causes were important moral issues, the publication of Pope Paul's encyclical Humanae Vitae (1968) on Birth Control seemed to turn the clock back on the whole question of morality.

Without discussing in detail here the implications of this encyclical and the heat it caused all over the world, the Pope's reassertion of the 'natural law' argument ran counter to the Council which had avoided the Aristotelian language of essences and functions based on a view of biological determinism. Dualism, for example, had been rejected by the Council Fathers in their discussion on the nature of marital love and procreation. Although the conciliar document did not come up with a new doctrine, their personalistic and almost existential approach showed a difference in emphasis. It was conceded, for example, that "marriage...is not instituted solely for procreation", but also for the development of the mutual love of the spouses (The Church today, art. 50). Humanae Vitae for all its compassion created more controversy than anything else the post-conciliar Church has known and became the symbol of a retarded view of co-responsibility in the view of many Catholics.[4]

---

4. A. Greeley has shown that Humanae Vitae, as far as the American Catholic Church goes, was one of the worst catastrophes in religious history despite the fact that Vatican II had a positive effect on the majority of American Catholics. Catholic Schools in a Declining Church, Sheed & Ward, Kansas City, 1976, chapter 5, 'Council of Encyclical?', pp. 103 - 154.

Another consequence of Pope Paul's encyclical was that his leadership lost credibility. It threw doubt on the magisterium Ecclesiae when it became known that Pope Paul had ridden rough shod over the principle of collegiality which had been fully endorsed in the Vatican II documents. Indeed, the encyclical had not been put forward under the formal label of 'infallibility', and this fact added more confusion since most people did not know what kind of assent it expected and what was to be done about those who disagreed. In addition, whereas theologians and bishops undertook a series of salvage - operations to make the reception of the papal injunction plausible, it became clear that most of them became spokesmen for a cause in which they did not believe themselves.[5]

Yet it would be a grave mistake to take the reactions to Humanae Vitae as a real index of the inner crisis of the Church or to suppose that subsequent conflicts referred to sexual morality alone. The encyclical had shown that moral rules had been detached from the values they were designed to defend. These rules were seen as sacred and were regarded in the encyclical as legitimating overall social and personal identity in highly differentiated societies. Pope Paul's defence of the sacred was not disputed, but what was challenged was his insistence on the uniform application of rules to different social and cultural life worlds. Put in another way, the question that gradually emerged, after the initial controversy over the encyclical had died out, was the problem of the relationship between principles and rules.

As was pointed out earlier, the breaking up of the collective image of the Church into separate images which would 'fit' the needs and aspirations of local communities was likely to induce in the members a division of loyalty and commitment oscillating between new and old conceptions of morality. In such a situation it is more than likely that choice, both personal and collective, is determined more by the values the members hold in esteem than by the institutional and overarching value system of the

5. A.M. Greeley, op. cit., pp. 322 - 323.

Church, although the selective process will be dialectical and uneven depending on the cohesive strength of the communities in question.

Liturgical implications

But nowhere are the changes introduced by Vatican II more apparent than in the liturgical dimension. If planned change has often unforeseen consequences, it is in this dimension that one ought to look for repercussions. It is in ritual worship that sacred power is manifested as something structured. Yet little is known about the impact of these changes in this crucial area of the religious life. This is surprising in view of the fact that the way people worship gives us more insight into their 'real' attitudes (as distinct form what they'say') to the sacred than an abstract examination of what they believe. Besides, it is by observing ritual as it takes place in the assembly that we can study with some assurance in what ways its underlying myth is manifested. It is true that myth does not always need ritual but any meaningful ritual must involve myth which serves the ritual scenario with its terms of reference in which all the metaphors interlock. It is worth stating that the movement towards liturgical reform that now has been underway in the Church, tends to reduce this close connection of myth and ritual in a direction of greater theological explicitness and linguistic clarity. Yet this movement in favour of the written and spoken word may well undermine the symbolic density of the Mass. Furthermore, liturgical change more than anything else symbolised for most Catholics changes in beliefs and values. If change in the Mass was possible, then changes in what one ought to believe about formal doctrines would be of lessening importance.

The Council had stressed the principle of 'active participation'. The liturgy was no longer to be regarded as the private act of the priest, to which the laity were admitted as spectators, but as the public act by which the People of God shared in the sacrifice of Christ. As the Council put it, the faithful when present at Mass "should not be there as strangers or silent spectators... but should participate knowingly, devoutly, and actively"[1] (On the Sacred Liturgy art.48.). But once the principle of participation had been clearly formulated, and given the replacement of Latin by the use of the vernacular, the way to changing the traditional form of the liturgy was open to the needs of its local community. But the problem was how much creativity would be allowed to the People of God ? This is not the place to chronicle the history of experimentation which marked the early 60s. What, however, emerged after the dust had settled was the fact that the new liturgy itself does not create or constitute a locally limited community because its proper effect is to unite the faithful together in a People of God that transcends particular time and places. Thus the attempt to kill two birds with one stone came to very little and left the deeper issues unresolved.

In the process of liturgical reform there is a stress on the importance of ritual participation where the congregation has become more markedly the focal point. For example, the present custom of receiving Holy Communion during Mass by those who wish to has the intended consequence of increasing collective awareness among the participants which in its turn releases judgements on its collective value. This may in turn entail a greater awareness on the part of the worshippers that the Mass intends to evoke spiritual feelings of the sacred as communal. Here we come dangerously close to one of Durkheim's fundamental assumptions, that religious ritual has the group as its focus. This effect was certainly not intended but followed from the principle of adaptation of

---

1. Documents of Vatican.II (On the Sacred Liturgy) Article 48.

liturgy to the grass roots. In order to understand more fully what is happening today in Catholic ritual it is necessary to draw out some of the sociological implications which have been overlooked by contending parties in their wrangling over externals. The real issue concerns the nature and function of ritual in a changing society where the relation of the individual to the group and the religion he belongs to is subject to immense stresses.

Ritual must express a social order with a hierarchy of rights and obligations in order to be meaningful in any sense of the word. But order, as Mary Douglas reminds us, does not consist in mixing what should be kept apart. "Holiness", she argues, "is exemplified by completeness. Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong. And holiness requires that different classes of things shall not be confused ".[2] This view of social order may well have been entailed in the rules of Leviticus which are cited by her as an expression of the victory of order over chaos where a tribal group fears lest it be submerged by its hostile neighbours. However, it is the interrelationship of ritual and social order in a complex industrial society which is at stake in Catholic ritual. For one thing, modern man is no longer defined by the degree to which he harmonises himself through group symbols to established patterns of order, but rather by the degree to which he can escape the tyranny of social conventions imposed on him by technocratic society. It is true- as is argued in this study - that individual creativity is limited and that most people depend on the symbolic formation given to them by the traditions to which they belong and which sets limits on the ways in which they experience the sacred, but things being equal it does not help very much

---

2. Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger, New York. 1966, p. 53.
For a sociological discussion of the tensions between ritual and social change in industrial society, see R.Bocock,Ritual in Industrial Society, Allen and Unwin Ltd., London,1974, especially Chapter 8, Ritual,Social Change and Counter-Culture'.

in the comparative study of religion to repeat in new ways the belief in the social function of myth and ritual to the extent that they are believed to contribute to the maintenance of social order. What social order ? Many of the counter-culture groups of the early 70s attempted to reintegrate ritual action with other experiences which became available to them. Activities of such groups, as exemplified in demonstrations, sit-ins, political rallies, in their attempts to promote liberation, produced new symbols to express their discontent with the established order and the ways in which they believed they should be protesting against perceived inequalitites.

Confing ourselves to what Mary Douglas has called the 'running away from ritual' as a social phenomenon in the modern world, it is perhaps the tension between personal creativity and commitment to common symbols which constitutes at least part of the crisis in ritual. The Church expressed a desire to avoid "a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or the good of the whole community". She also wished to respect"... the gifts of the various races and peoples".[3] Yet, at the same time she asserts that "liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations of the Church, which is the sacrament of unity...a holy people united and organized under their bishops" (ibid.,art.26). Looking at the early experiments conducted in the workshop of liturgy which took place in the early 60s, it is clear that many of the home-made liturgies in small groups while giving the participants elbow room for spontaneity and self-expression did not last very long. There have been invented liturgies with rice and tea instead of bread and wine, with pop-music and readings from revolutionary literature thrown in for good measure in order to facilitate the Spirit.[4] Guitar strummming priests and nuns singing of the love of Jesus

---

3. Documents of Vatican II :On the Sacred Liturgy, Art. 37.
4. For an illustration of such experiments in the USA, see 'US Catholics, 1972', in The Month, May 1972, p.135 et seq.

made a short appearance while the more sober forms like folk-Masses became institutionalised. Most of these 'do-it-yourself' liturgies arose out of spontaneous needs, brooking no institutional restraints and rejecting the accumulated inheritance of past culture, from which items were randomly brought together. As social anthropologists from Durkheim onwards have shown, ritual is a social activity which requires an organization and a structure. Its function is not to do-away with emotion but to give it a mould in which the personal element is linked with the social categories of human existence. A consistent theme is social anthropology has been that ritual activity reflects , among other things, social relationships.

Taking the anthropological question of the social function of ritual in industrial society with some caution, it could still be profitably asked what sort of actual or potential models of social relationships are mirrored in the new rite of the Mass. Does the Mass, for example, in spite of its new form still reflect a social order reminiscent of the past ? Does the Mass in its new form reflect the contemporary social order? For whatever lessons can be drawn from the post-conciliar period with regards community-building, the central problem in ritual occasions appears to revolve more and more round the emergence of differentiated groups where ritual occurs and on the effects it will have on the experience of the members of these groups. The emphasis on participation poses from this point of view another paradox. On the one hand, participation in ritual is encouraged for the purpose of knowing ourselves, as our own centre of religious awareness. On the other, this intended growth in the individual's religious awareness suffers a check on its realization because the members of a group are required both to transcend the interests of the group and yet be restrained by its social boundaries.

It was for this reason that the writer paid attention to finding out to what extent the new Mass 'fits' the expectations of the socially mobile Catholics in the parish community of St. Jerome's. While recognizing that the Mass was in the past an important means of self-identification especially for the descendants of Irish immigrants, it seemed worthwhile to investigate how much of this symbolic value was left in the attitudes and practices of the group.

One more point has to be mentioned in connection with the renewal of liturgical signs. It can be argued that for most Catholics the real revolution during the early part of the post-conciliar period lay in the ritual dimension in that the Eucharist as sign of immanence surrounded by taboos was presented as one of community to which the laity would have more ready access. Here we touch the crux of the matter in the crisis of symbolic representations. For too long the institutional stress in the Tridentine Mass has been largely centered on the efficacy of the sacraments in general, their ex-opere effectiveness, so that their further potential meanings remained obscured in worship. But Vatican II by making the Eucharist the real sign of the local community, achieved only a half-hearted solution. The Council sought, on the one hand, to preserve the traditional Catholic doctrine on the Eucharist in full rigour as can be shown in the Constitution On The Sacred Liturgy where the doctrine of the Eucharist is repeated in the familiar vocabulary (art.47,48), which constituted the basic form of the Tridentine Mass. It is stated without equivocation that: "The dogmatic principles which were laid down by the Council of Trent remaining intact, communion under both kinds may be granted.. (under certain conditions).." (art. 55.). On the other hand, it proposed that: "the intrinsic nature and purpose of its several parts, as also the connections between them, can be more clearly manifested, and that devout and active participation by the faithful can be more easily established" (art.50). But for all these concessions, the implications of this shift were not fully worked out and have remained a source of perplexity for many Catholics. For example,

whereas the terms 'going to Mass' and 'attending the Eucharist' have become synonymous in ordinary parlance, the former was closely related to the idea that the Mass is a real sacrifice each time it is celebrated, while the latter phrase and its equivalents tend to accentuate more its communal character and less its effacacious character as something achieved apart from the participating community.

However, in fairness to the Council Fathers it must be said that their intention was to enhance the understanding of liturgy as a sacrament in the contemporary world. But their approach was pragmatic and pastoral. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy for this reason does not provide a theological, much less a philosophical and linguistic account of the meaning and role of symbolism in the liturgy. It took this role for granted and hoped for the best. Yet in spite of their intentions, there is a reluctance to depart from a magical conception of sacramental activity. This is evident in the statement that "the sanctification of man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which corresponds with each of these signs".[5] This formulation retains much of the old doctrine of signs in which physical causality used to be the centre-piece in explaining how sacraments work. Granted that sacraments are signs, should not their causality be seen as deriving from the very nature of the sign? Indeed, real signs as distinct from those called into play arbitrarily and by convention indicate and present something distinct from themselves.

---

5. Documents of Vatican II On the Sacred Liturgy, art.7. (emphasis, mine). The question of the relationship of the individual to institutional symbols in religion is discussed by Thomas Luckmann, The Invisible Religion, London 1967.

Apart from the question to what extent a change in ritual language affects a corresponding change in the message, there is the more important problem of the meaning of the message.

This means in practical terms that Catholics though encouraged to decipher the code of the new liturgy have to reckon with the intrusion of other competitive socio- cultural codes. The case for the vernacular, for example, has been widely discussed. But even the upholders of the vernacular position have come to realize that the vernacular is no panacea since words in a sacred context are the most delicate of signs. If you have a vernacular liturgy you must have a changing liturgy ; otherwise it will finally be vernacular in name only. The idea of a 'timeless' vernacular is impossible. Here then we reach another paradox : the restoration of the word in liturgical worship has come in a time when the authority of the word has lost its hold on contemporary man. As George Steiner remarks : "The Apostle tells us that at the beginning was the Word. He gives us no assurance as to the end".[6]

For these reasons, the author addressed himself to what the Eucharistic sign meant to the group and in what ways its underlying message came through to them, in order to discover what discrepancies exist between ecclesiastical formulation and the expectations of the group.

---

6. George Steiner, Language and Silence, Pelican, 1969, p. 31.

Chapter II

CONCEPTUALIZATIONS

Methodological considerations

As was pointed out earlier, there is now a need for in depth research on religious groups at grass roots. Macro theories about the contemporary metamorphosis of religion in complex societies are usually concerned with the process of secularization without specifying at an empirical level the qualitative aspects of religious change.[1] There are some secularization theories, for example, which deal with the demise of the 'sacred' drawn from Durkheim's static dichotomy of the sacred and profane. But the problem arises at once how these static categories can be shown to exist in human experience. David Martin has pointed out the difficulties of separating the religious and the secular spheres; he even argues that the concept of secularization has been used as "a tool of counter religious ideologies which identify the 'real' element in religion for polemical purposes and then arbitrarily relate it to the notion of a unitary and irreversible process..."[2] Larry Shiner has identified six types of secularization concept in use today and suggests that we drop the word entirely and employ instead terms such as 'transposition' or 'differentiation' which are both more descriptive and neutral.[3] Anthropologists like Evans-Pritchard have equally found little use in applying such notions in their fieldwork.[4]

---

1. Acts of the 12th International Conference on Sociology of Religion, The Hague, 1973. See also, Dr. N. Kokosalakis, 'The Contemporary Metamorphosis of Religion?' in The Human Context, vol. 3, pp. 306-317, 1974.
2. David Martin, The Religious and the Secular, London, 1969. pp 16-17
3. Larry Shiner, 'The Concept of secularization in empirical research', Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, vol. 6, 1967, pp. 207-20.
4. E. Evans-Pritchard, Theories of Primitive Religion, London, 1965, p. 65. For a more recent discussion of this theme, see P.E. Glasner, The Sociology of Secularization, London: Routledge, 1977.

What is urgently needed now in the comparative study of religion is not so much new theoretical formulations on what religion 'is' and 'does' in some reified form, but rather in depth studies of how far men's religious beliefs are actually operative. It might be more fruitful to discover what religion means to members of specific groups, and to ask them in what crucial areas of their lives beliefs are experienced by them. In doing so we might be able to understand more imaginatively not only in what shape and direction religious ideas and sentiments are forming in a given group, but also how religious changes are continually reshaped both by social factors and by religious institutions themselves. A researcher is no longer confronted with the question of the 'correct' definition of a particular religion in complex societies, but in the words of Clifford Geertz with "discovering just what sorts of belief and practices support what sorts of faith under what sorts of conditions".[5]

A researcher can no longer assume a priori that certain institutional beliefs and values are necessarily central to the consciousness of the group of people who hold them or that their 'definition of the situation' is actually being governed by religious norms. There may be quite different stimuli at work which are explained by them in religious language simply because religious concepts and idioms are the immediately available code.

It was indicated in the previous chapter that the present study is directed towards an interpretative understanding of how a group of Roman Catholics cope with the meaning of some of the central doctrines and rituals of their Church in a time of rapid social change. To put it differently, what happens to them when the traditional symbols of their faith seem to be loosing a hold on their behaviour? What happens when the 'concordance' between symbolic and social system is getting unstuck in some specific areas of their life-world? What do they do with the 'collective representations' of their faith - once they possess them, even if this possession is never a total fact - and how do they cope with them? General answers to these questions are extremely hard

---

5. Geertz, Clifford Islam Observed, New Haven, 1968, p.1.

to find because they by-pass the socio-cultural particulars in which individual reactions take on flesh and blood. Difficult as such an attempt may be, the aim of this study is to discover the group's attitudes to some of the major symbols of their faith. It is necessary to explain a little more the perspective in which this research has been undertaken and the theoretical concerns underlying the perspective.

The theoretical assumption in this study is that there is in any society a continual drive for consonance between symbolic forms and social structure in the broad sense of these terms. The ways we eat, dress and communicate with each other entail a drive for matching different levels of experience through the mediation of language and other forms of communication. It was Durkheim and Mauss who in their monograph Primitive Classification endeavoured to postulate the priority of the social over the individual in the symbolic order. They concerned themselves with symbolic classifications of a moral or religious nature and maintained that the human mind lacks the innate capacity to construct complex systems of classification such as every society has, and which are cultural products. They asked what could have served as model for such schemes of classification. Their answer was that the model is society itself. They ignored the fact that a society need not employ only a single mode of classification. But such correspondence can no longer be taken for granted in complex societies.[6] In contrast to primitive societies symbolic correspondences in modern societies are difficult to establish. Men's common interests as members of groups are not limited to their collective interests, for often the goals of group existence are at variance with the interests of the group.

---

6. Mary Douglas following a Durkheimian perspective approaches the study of ritual in complex society from a somewhat similar standpoint. She looks "for tendencies and correlations between the character of the symbolic system and that of the social system", but admits that the "hypothesis about concordance will always have to be tested within a given environment", Natural Symbols, Pelican, 1973, p.12, pp.27-28.

As Jean Labbens puts it: "Modern man is rather like a small investor who has put his money into too many different concerns to have real links with any of them. Dissatisfaction from religion seems to be largely due to the fact that he belongs to too many groups and to too varied cultures with the consequence that no value can be binding on him. "[7] This is clearly the case in contemporary Roman Catholicism when many of the traditional symbols have become freely accessible to each individual member without obligation.

Furthermore, subcultures and counter groups in modern society do their own opting from the available stock of images and symbols so that it is difficult just to assert the death of traditional symbols, myths and ritual. General claims about symbols and what they mean to people depends on a researcher's ability to specify particular classes of signs and symbols and to formulate the nature of the various challenges posed to people who use them. Whereas there is a newly emerging interest in the human sciences and in theology in the study of symbols, rituals and myths, in short, in the study of meaning, a holistic approach to symbolic forms and expression will be almost impossible. This is one of the reasons why so little has been achieved in the study of symbols in complex societies.

This new interest is a move in the right direction when the sociologist of religion can no longer be satisfied with identifying religion with church affiliation, church membership and formal attendance.

If religion is accepted as being nothing more than formal participation and the like, then sociologists like Bryan Wilson are correct in their analysis of the decline of religion in western societies.[8] Gallup polls and

---

7. Cited in F. Boulard, An Introduction to Religious Sociology, trans.and introd. M. Jackson, Darton, Longman & Todd, 1965, p. 17.
8. Bryan Wilson, Religion in Secular Society, Pelican, 1969, p.14, passim.

statistical surveys on church attendance do not take account of the number of individuals who attend worship but only of attendance in the abstract, and this way preclude an understanding of what beliefs and practices mean to the people.[9] We are faced also with the problem that religious institutions make their estimates on different bases, so that their available statistics can only be compared in a few ways. Opinion polls provide a valuable service in collecting material on religous affiliation and opinions, but their techniques are not able to deal with definitions of membership when, for example, Catholics tend to define the obligation of going to Mass on Sundays in ways which may have little relation to institutional requirements.

As said in the previous chapter, the emphasis on seeing religion as a cultural system and process has brought about new orientations in research. Church orientated behaviour and research problems determined by the institutional forms of traditional church organization, are not seen by this approach as very promising theoretically.

Given the symbolic crisis in religion, it is not surprising that new definitions of religion tend to include religious symbols as as essential component. To cite one of the many definitions on this line, Robert N. Bellah defines religion "as a set of symbolic forms and acts that relate man to the ultimate conditions of his existence"[10] as an overall framework for understanding religious evolution in general. He makes use of Voegelin's notion of the movement from compact to differentiated symbols, as well as describing differentiation within religious groups. Like previous evolutionary theorists, he assumes that religion in complex societies is moving along a linear dimension towards the most liberal variety of symbolic expressions and forms. Bellah's notion of linearity like the one employed by theorists of secularization is

---

9. Dr. W.S.F. Pickering, 'Who goes to Church?', The Social Sciences and the Churches ed. C.L. Mitton, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1972, p. 182.
10. Robert N. Bellah, Beyond Belief, Harper & Row, New York, 1970, p. 14. An exposition of this view in more detail is to be found in R.N. Bellah's article 'Religious evolution', American Sociological Review, 1964, vol. 29, no. 3, pp. 358-74.

far too general to be of much use in research. It would be plausible to say that Catholic ritual today is in a process of differentiation, but it would take empirical research to show that it is going through a sequence in the sense Bellah and other theorists understand it.

This example shows that symbolic approaches to the study of religion are badly in need of detailed research on how religious symbolism works in a given community if we are to avoid generalizations. There is the very urgent task of spelling out the precise nature of the various types of religion and their corresponding symbols, particularly in the context of western industrial society, where Christian symbols have become in many ways part of the general culture and have lost their distinctiveness and referential power. The difficulty is increased by the fact that various disciplines are developing their own techniques and conceptual frameworks within their own specialised spheres of interest. Anthropological, sociological and theological descriptions of the same symbol may not, under further scrutiny, be descriptions of the same phenomenon at all. Theologians of a more conservative cast of mind may find fault, for example, with Erich Fromm's contention "that the problem of religion is not the problem of God but the problem of man", in that "religious formulations and religious symbols are attempts to give expression to certain kinds of human experience".[11] Fromm is not hostile to religion; he only speaks as a psychoanalyst, using the insights of Freud into the language of dreams. Freud has attempted to show that the language of religious myth is essentially not different from that of dreams, that it is a meaningful expression of significant experiences, and so forth.

This point is worth stressing. Religious institutions have always tried to represent and mediate the universe of meaning by selecting from the common stock of symbols those which they judged to be most appropriate for conveying religious ideas. Members of a religion may look on certain practices as having a purely symbolic significance for them, while for members of another

---

11. Erich Fromm, Psychoanalysis and Religion, New Haven & London, 1973, p. 113.

religion the same practices are experienced as literal. The idea of 'ritual' has different meanings for different religions. Ritual, for example, for a Jew is associated with family life; it is a home-centred affair but has connections with what goes on in the synagogue. Roman Catholics have been accustomed to see the ritual act exemplified in the celebration of the Mass. In ordinary language, sacramental worship is 'out there'. Catholics 'go to' or 'attend Mass', and the Mass itself is not conceived just as a symbol, but also as a sign in the broadest sense of the word, a literal happening. Catholic theologians in their attempts to renew the theology of the liturgy are precisely hampered in their approach to modernization because centuries of tradition taught the ordinary man in the pew that the Mass is what the Church says it is, namely, Christ becoming physically present in the forms of bread and wine.[12]

Catholic theology has always avoided - at least after the Council of Trent - using the term 'symbolic presence' and has insisted on seeing the Eucharist and the sacraments as signs. According to this position sacraments signify what they effect. As was pointed out in the previous chapter, much of the crisis in the Catholic faith is related to new shifts of the awareness of ordinary Catholics regarding the status of sacramental signs.

This inquiry proposes to focus on the factors used in coping with changing situations in the sphere of beliefs and practices in the group such as has been discussed. Such adaptive processes can be conceptualised in various ways. One way is to use the concept of relative deprivation to explain why members of a religious group react to changes in the belief system. Cultural shifts create stresses on the credibility of religious symbols. It could be argued that people change their attitude towards beliefs and values simply because they do no longer satisfy intellectual and emotional needs. Glock has used

---

12. Modern Catholic theologians caused much confusion when they introduced the term 'transignification' replacing the familiar term 'transubstantiation'. See. E. Schillebeeckx, The Eucharist, Sheed and Ward, London, 1968.

the concept of relative deprivation to explain the origin of religious sects among certain groups, whose members feel various kinds of deprivation by comparison with others of the same group.[13] Men can feel themselves to be deficient in positions of different sorts: social, economic, political, religious.

As in the case of secularization theories, here also it is very difficult to know the various types of deprivation people may experience. Since probably most people feel that they are deprived of something, and the theory refers not to their objective situation but to how they feel, the empirical question is how we can break down these categories of deprivation for observation without getting involved in a circular argument. A much more serious objection to this theory is that it assumes that religion should be essentially defined in terms of meaning and 'ultimate values'. Some sociologists following Weber and Freud maintain that the chief function of religion is to provide its adherents witn a mechanism for coping with psychological maladjustment. As is known well enough, Weber emphasised in his work the central role of belief and meaning in religion and society. But if religion is defined this way, it runs the risk of being reduced to an inefficient psychological compensation for deprivation which can be removed by economic, social and political changes. It may well be the case that Catholics change their attitudes to the Church because of discontent with the hierarchical system of government or with new forms of ritual worship. But when the pattern of religious indifference is observed to involve the Catholic population as a whole irrespective of class, social position and mobility, it is obvious that we are dealing with a phenomenon which cannot so easily be reduced to types of deprivation. Roman Catholicism in this country is no longer a ghetto religion. In terms of education, occupation and income the Catholic community is almost indistinguishable from

---

13. C. Y. Glock and R. Stark, Religion and Society in Tension, Rand MacNally, 1965, pp. 242-59. Accounts for the origin of religious groups in terms of five types of relative deprivation which may result in religious response.

the rest of the community. They have become socially mobile and are now part of the social and cultural life of the country.

There is, therefore, no sociological reason for treating strain situations in religion differently from similar ones in which people find themselves. Adjustment to new needs is bound to follow from social change. Conflicts over beliefs and values need not necessarily lead to disruptions in the social life of a group whose members are likely to counter challenges by using available options. People in all societies have found ways and means to extricate themselves from strains arising from changes in the social structure. Anthropologists like Max Gluckman have shown that protests, so far from destroying the social order, work so that they support this order.[14] This idea applies to institutions and individuals in their confrontation with internal changes.

John Bowker coins the word 'route-finding activity' as the principal characteristic of religion. "Religions", he writes, "should be conceived as route-finding activities, mapping the general path along which human beings can trace their way from birth to death and through death, and that the peculiarly 'religious' quality is evoked by a focus on limitations which circumscribe the continuity of human life-ways, of a particularly intransigent kind".[15] He further argues that "beliefs, rituals, concepts, activities, which have subsequently seemed able to be defined as 'religious' ... should in fact be analysed in relation to particular compounds of limitation which can be specified in their case."[16]

Many anthropologists have been, in fact, concerned with studying such processes in simple societies whereby groups and individuals are enabled to

---

14. Max Gluckman, Custom and Conflict in Africa, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1973.
15. John Bowker, The Sense of God, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1973, p. 82.
16. Ibid., p. 64.

adjust themselves to situations involving tensions of different sorts. Arnold Van Gennep, for example, has given us a unique contribution to an understanding of life-crises connected with rites of passage surrounding the passage from one social position to another along the paths of 'separation', 'transition' and 'incorporation'.[17] According to him the purpose of corporate ritual is the incorporation of the individual within a defined social status. Though the chief purpose of the rites of passage is to codify corporate existence and to overcome the inevitable interpersonal problems entailed in any kind of social organization, the rites do not necessarily swamp the individuals but allow them to resolve personal problems of identity-crises as well within the given structures. Van Gennep dealt with simple societies; it is far from clear how his model is applicable to complex societies consisting of a variety of groups that overlap one another.

Considering the conceptual difficulties involved in describing and analysing such complex processes, taking place in Roman Catholicism at both the collective and individual level, the writer was guided from the start by his own personal experience of what Bowker has called 'route-finding' as characteristic of religion.

The recurrent use of organic models by sociologists has its justification in the fact that organisms are examples of systems. To the extent that the organic model has proved useful in analysis it has been so because the organism was a paradigmatic case of a 'system'. Durkheim who used the model of mechanistic and organic solidarity in his work was himself quite aware of the usefulness of analogy in explanations. "If analogy", he writes, "is not a method of demonstration in the true sense of the word, it is nevertheless a method of illustration and of secondary verification ... analogy is a legitimate form of comparison."[18] Robert A. Nisbet has given a

17. Arnold Van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, trans. by M.B. Vizedom & G.L. Cafee, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960.
18. E. Durkheim, Sociology and Philosophy, transl. by D.F. Pocock, Cohen and West, London, 1965, p. 2.

fascinating spectrum of root metaphors used by philosophers, theologians and social scientists for dealing with complex ideas such as 'growth', 'progress', 'equilibrium' and so forth. As he points out: "...metaphor is our means of effecting instantaneous fusion of two separate realms of experience into one illuminating, iconic encapsulating image."[19] It was indicated in the preceding chapter that many of the problems in the Church today are tied up with new ways of speaking about metaphysical beliefs. This must be so since religion in particular is dependent on the meaningful use of metaphor in bringing home to the believer the reality behind the symbol. It is increasingly realized by scholars that metaphor is not just detachable from language and thought, a device that may be imported into language in order to achieve specific effects.

Conceptual model: Religion as a form of bricolage

Let us look closely at an analogy used by Lévi-Strauss in La Pensée Sauvage which may prove useful to our analysis[1]. In the opening chapter of this book, he introduces the term bricolage as an account of the means by which the non-literate, non-technical mind of so-called primitive man responds to the world around him. Bricolage in its broadest sense appears as a creative activity covering not only the transformational process within the mythological world itself but also the ad hoc responses to mythical transformations in the mind of the myth-user called bricoleur

Before looking at this analogy in more detail, it is just as well to start the discussion with a personal disavowal. This study has no connection with the wider assumptions of his thought on the nature of the human mind. His interest in a universal structure of thought common to all mankind has absorbed so many philosophical elements that his shifting positions have baffled even some of his imitators in the field of structural anthropology. He seems to offer a perspective in which it is hardly possible

---

19. Robert A. Nisbet, Social Change and History, Oxford University Press, Inc. New York, 1969, p.4.

1. Cl. Lévi-Strauss, La Pensée Sauvage (1962), translated as The Savage Mind, George Widenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1968, pp. 16-32.

to correlate particular kinds of symbolic structures with predicted social variables. Yet this should not prevent us from using his insights to suit our own particular problem. To avoid confusion, it should be stated at once that in Levi-Strauss the 'Bricoleur' cannot be conceived as an individual subject who as a member of a group is involved in modifying the myths of his culture. This point will become clearer in the course of the discussion.

Returning to the analogy, Lévi-Strauss tells us something about the verb 'bricoler'. It refers in its original usage to ball games and billiards, to hunting, shooting or riding. It was always used with reference to some extraneous movement: a ball rebounding, or a horse swerving from its direct course to avoid an obstacle. In modern French the word bricoleur has preserved some of these connotations. The bricoleur means someone who works with his own hands to make something new from bits and pieces left over in a workshop. He can be compared to a sort of handyman who will use whatever comes to hand to do a job by inspired improvisation rather than with purpose-made parts.[2] The main point here is that every symbolic structure is affected by the fact that its component parts have been used before and will be used again.

This form of activity , first, applies to mythological thought itself which is seen as a transformation of its component elements (the 'mythemes') within a heterogeneous repertoire though limited. Mythical though builds up structures by fitting together events, or rather the remains of events. These elements are grouped together and set in opposition to each other, and then regrouped in other sets of opposition. This is to say that myths transform themselves by interacting upon each other as though they have a life of their own.

---

2. The translator notes that "The term 'bricoleur' has no precise equivalent in English. He is a man who undertakes odd jobs and is a Jack-of-all-trades or a kind of professional do-it-yourself man, but, as the text makes clear, he is of different standing from for instance, the English 'odd-job-man' or handyman." Ibid., p.17.

Here we are not so much concerned with Lévi-Strauss's continually moving forward and backward from bricolage conceived as the essential activity of collective mythical thought to the bricoleur who at the concrete level does what the myths do in their own right.

Looking now at the bricoleur, we may ask what he is up to. His laboratory is the mythological world and he is busily engaged in decoding and encoding the messages conveyed to him by mythical collective representations. He does this by using the materials 'at hand' and reassembles them into something new. These materials are bundles of familiar images and usable objects which constitute the fabric of his life world. The elements which he picks up from these materials have had a long history and have long been accepted as part of the tradition into which the bricoleur is born. But his main job is to work with 'signs'. What are these signs? Here we get into murky waters. 'Signs resemble images in being concrete entities but they resemble concepts in their power of reference' (p.18). Following Saussure, Levi-Strauss thinks of signs as a 'link between images and concepts'. But unlike Saussure he plays down the arbitrary nature of the link between accoustic image (sound) and concept, the former being called by Saussure the significant (signifier), and the latter the signifié (signified).[3] This distinction is given an extra dimension by Levi-Strauss by imposing on it the distrinction between code and message.

This question has some importance for the study of Christian beliefs and rituals. Many of the central Christian metaphors are 'natural', that is, motivated. We can now accept that, for example, bodily experience and the body image have been found as motivating elements in ritual symbols. As Barthes has pointed out when discussing the topic; "The mythical signification.. is never arbitrary; it is always in part motivated, and unavoidably contains some analogy".[4] Verylittle can be understood of transformations in the Catholic

---

3. The arbitrariness of the linguistic sign has been discussed by many scholars. Lévi-Strauss says:"the linguistic sign is arbitrary a priori,but ceases to be a posteriori" Structural Anthropology, Anchor Books, 1967, p.90.
4. R. Barthes, Mythologies, Paladin, 1973, p.126.

belief system if this point is ignored. Whereas the doctrine of the Last Supper, for example, has undergone many transformations during the course of its theological development as it passed from one group of Christians to another, it is obvious that their motivation in interpreting the sign entered the liturgical practices themselves without groups having become aware of this fact. On the other hand, it is possible that other signs can pass from motivation to non-motivation.[5]

But whatever the bricoleur is up to, his freedom is limited. 'The elements which the bricoleur collects and uses are "pre-constrained" like the constitutive elements of myth, the possible combinations of which are restricted by the fact that they are drawn from the language where they already possess a sense which sets a limit on their freedom of manoeuvre' (p.19).

Unlike the engineer who questions nature and tries to wrestle from it a message for the production of a new object that goes beyond nature, the bricoleur's choice in assembling signs is limited. 'His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with "whatever is at hand" ' (p.17). So the materials on which he has to work are as poor as his freedom to manipulate them. Again, 'the bricoleur addresses himself to a collection of oddments left over from human endeavours, that is, only a sub-set of culture' (p. 19). His materials are the remnants of culture, the language and tradition of the tribe, the myths of that tribe, but all of this is available only in its 'pre-constrained' state. Much further in the book Lévi-Strauss uses another potent image to illustrate the restriction to creative freedom imposed on the myths and the bricoleur. He compares man to a card player. This card game is a datum of history and civilization, and the player has to accept this datum for what is is. 'Each deal is the result of a contingent distribution of the cards, unknown to the players at the time. One must accept the cards which one is given, but each society, like each player, makes its interpretation in terms of several systems.. And we are well aware that different players will not play the same with the same hand

5. Perhaps Friday abstinence has become an unmotivated sign for Catholics though no special sacramental efficacy was officially imputed to the act.

even though the rules set limits on the games that can be played with any given one.' (p. 95). Hence, the bricoleur though provoking familiar signs in order to create new meanings cannot tinker at will with these signs as they are an integral part of the total system of myth.

When due allowances are made, the concept of bricolage is heuristically suggestive. Here we must be careful against being led astray by the analogy. To begin with, there is little in the description to suggest why bricolage should take place at all. Why should the bricoleur shake up his materials like one may shake a kaleidoscope? As was already mentioned, 'bricoler' originally implied the notion of swerving (of a horse, for example) from a direct course to avoid an obstacle. We are not told what sorts of obstacles they are and how they influence collective and individual bricolage. Levi-Strauss has shown how several myths, spread over a large area and in appearance very different, are reshufflings of a smaller number of elements. But, as some of his critics have repeatedly pointed out, his apparent neglect of the actual social conditions of myths leaves them hanging in the air.

A more serious objection is that the bricoleur is not an individual subject.[6] The use of the singular is deceptive here, implying individual creativity. Following the collectivistic tradition inaugurated by Durkheim and Mauss, Levi-Strauss does not seem to be interested in the individual, nor in his experience, nor in the content of this experience vis-a-vis the myths.

As was said earlier, the individual subject has no part in collective bricolage since the principle of categorization takes on the character of an autonomous object, independent of any subject. And Levi-Strauss accepts Paul Ricoeur's criticism of his work as a Kantianism without a transcendental subject in which the unity of the self is rooted as a valid description of his work.[7] Mauss had already anticipated the elimination of the subject by

---

6. Peter Eketh aptly defines the contrast between French and Anglo-Saxon sociology : "The intervention of society in individual life is the credo of the collectivistic tradition...; it is on the other hand the anathema of individualistic sociology", Social Exchange Theory, Heinemann, London 1974,14
7. Lévi-Strauss, The Raw and the Cooked, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1969, p.11.

pointing out in his essay on The Gift that society must be conceived as a system of relationships in which there is little room for individual creativity. For "it is groups", he writes, "and not individuals, which carry on exchange, make contracts, and are bound by moral obligation..."[8] The persons on this view are always moral persons, clans, tribes, families. Mauss's interest in his work on the gift as the principle of reciprocity lies in discovering the common morality underlying both economic and social life on the assumption that social institutions in simple society are undifferentiated and are at bottom religious, moral, legal, economic. In his view social exchange provided that morality.

But, as was indicated earlier, the religious problem has taken on a different dimension from the point of view of the relationship of individual and group in the context of contemporary Catholicism.

The fact that groups have become differentiated in complex industrial societies poses afresh the problem of the individuation of religious consciousness not only in the sphere of moral values and cognitive beliefs but also in that of communication. The shift taking place at uneven levels in modern society in general is a move away from the idea of society as a totality of function to the idea of a system of communication. Modern man is becoming increasingly his own interpreter of signs and symbols so that it is hardly possible for him to experience the meaning of group symbols. Thomas Luckmann has argued that the individuation of religious consciousness is one of the crisis-points in western religion. His argument that individual autonomy has become problematic with regard to religion as a meaning system has long been anticipated by Durkheim who imputed the emergence of the cult of individualism to Christianity itself.[9] There is, unlike in simple societies, a kind of switching of codes going on in our society where the relationship

8. Marcel Mauss, The Gift, trans. Ian Cunnison, Cohen & West, London, 1970, p.3.
9. Cited in Anthony Giddens, Emile Durkheim: Selected Writings, Cambridge Press, 1972, p. 22.

of signified and signifier is under attack. Sign systems are on the run, preying upon each other on a scale unimaginable to the Lévi-Straussian bricoleur whose signs were mainly restricted to verbal culture. Unlike him, modern man has to decipher an ever increasing flood of signs which are becoming increasingly detached from their traditional meanings.

While Catholics in the past were hardly involved in decoding the message, now they have been invited to do so both in their local communities and as individuals on many of the issues discussed in the previous chapter. There is an increasing demand for individuating the message to such an extent that for many Catholics the meaningfulness of language has become crucial. This situation requires an approach different from that of systemic sociology the classificatory schemes of which are abstracted from individual behaviour.

Considering this situation, is it possible to describe and analyse individual bricolage? If religion can be described as a 'route-finding activity' - to use Bowker's phrase - can we see the same activity as being used by individuals in thier own circumstances within the compounds of limitation? Or inverting Lévi-Strauss: is it possible to discover in what ways the group and its members spin the variants of their beliefs?

Let us use the basic insight which the analogy of bricolage in Straussian terms provided us. Randomization of beliefs may be a recent phenomenon in Roman Catholicism, but it surely does not occur in a social vacuum. Religious ideas and sentiments and the varieties they are likely to take are not self-contained but are inextricably bound up with socially available constructs of which language is the most important one. As Lévi-Strauss puts it: 'The elements which the bricoleur collects and uses are "pre-constrained". The postulate is that when individuals and groups begin to develop new attitudes to religious ideas, it will be certain that individual choices are not just personal creations irrespective of the culture in which they originate.

It is postulated on this basis that individual choices are possible, but that their possibility is rooted in the emergence of new social arrangements in response to new social-cultural factors, favouring perhaps one set of alternatives over another. In modern industrial societies there are many kinds of choice possible which were extremely limited in simple societies whose members had in the words of Mauss "no choice in the matter (of exchange)".

A further point to be noted is that individual bricolage can not be detached from the institutional context in which it takes place, that is, from the institution seen as a symbolic system which provides a specific set of symbols and signs with which the bricoleur has to work. Symbolic interactionists taking their lead from George H. Mead believe that social objects are constituted in the symbolic indications that people make to each other and that social interaction is dependent on the creative capacities of individuals who use linguistic signs and symbols to generate and maintain social structures.[10] All actions, they maintain, stem from symbolic meanings each person attaches to his self in a given situation and the meanings he attributes to roles played by others in that situation. This point of view is social in that the roots of behaviour are sought beyond the biological nature of man, but it remains psychological in that the individual remains the unit of the analysis and his reactions and experiences remain the fundamental variables.

Here the notion of group, institution, does not seem to be of much importance. It is hard to conceive of pure sociation and of a cultural world though which the self becomes a significant other outside a particular framework in which certain symbolic structures have already been incorporated, and which serve as mediators in the process of socialization. Again, we cannot know what the bricoleur is up to unless he knows where the sign is.

---

10. George H. Mead, Mind, Self & Society, University of Chicago Press, 1967, p.78. For a discussion of Mead's views, see Herbert Blumer, Symbolic Interactionism, Prentice Hall, Inc./Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1969.

Before saying something more about individual bricolage seen against the backcloth of collective bricolage, it might be illuminating to cite some instances of this activity in contemporary society. Consider, for example, the phenomenon of counter-culture in dress. In many towns in England and the continent, you can observe changes in fashion. Sleeves and skirts may lengthen or become shorter, trousers flare or tighten. It is not enough to say that people or individuals imitate or follow some fashion designer or celebrity. Whole styles of fashion emerge on a collective basis. But that is not all. You may come across individuals, often young people, who rummage through odds and ends, left over from grandparents' time, to create their own personal style. The reshuffling takes as its object patterns of shapes and colours in striking combinations so as to effect not merely an image of group stance but also a personal stance within it. You may see people walking about in Kings Road in London who are able to combine the 'signs' of different periods (Victorian, Edwardian) to a point of perfection. The rise and spread of antique shops bears also testimony to this. People pick up bits and pieces to redecorate their house, to proclaim an image of themselves with the message : we are different from the rest. It might be thought that this sort of bricolage is wholly personal, creative and innovative, irrespective of the mileux in which these creative fashions originate. The elements, picked up at random, are in a sense 'pre-constrained': the meaning of each selected item has acquired a position (value) in the European language of fashion and furniture. A.Kroeber,[11] in a study of changes in woman's fashions, examined some literature on European and American high fashions going back some three hundred years. His study showed of course that

---

11. A.L. Kroeber, Anthropology, Revised Edition, New York: Harcourt Brace Janovitch, 1948, pp.332-333.

fashions change almost yearly. Over longer periods necklines plunged and then became unrevealing. Hemlines rose one year, rose a little higher and then went back after some years. But the important point he made was that in reality woman's fashions during the three hundred years were cyclical in their pattern, ranging between points of maximum exposure and maximum cover at roughly fifty years period. The alterations were variations on a basic scheme of western culture which remained unchanged throughout the period of three hundred years.

T.V. adverts and commercials are also examples of bricolage. You are invited to drink a certain brand of beer. A visual image is imposed on the linguistic sign 'beer' to effect a dislodgement of meaning associated with it. The linguistic sign is, first, cut off from some of its referents (signifies or signifieds) such as certain groups of people drinking beer in a country or town pub at certain times, and then through the mediacy of the visual image transposed to another plane of signification in which the new referents present a different type, group or class of people whose drinking beer points to social experiences different from those of traditional beer drinkers. The visual image (the modern male) refracts the linguistic sign by importing elements foreign to the established meaning. A famous actor or well known personality steps literally into the image and is drinking the beer advertised. Each element is mixed with another at seemingly random fashion, but the medley of linguistic signs and visual images derive their total meaning from the established language. Someone who has never heard of Orson Welles and sees him on T.V. advertising a British brand of sherry would miss a lot of the hidden meaning.

One more example will do. David Martin gives a description of the creation of three counter cultures in the bosom of historical Christianity in the context of western civilization. These counter cultures are based on 'choice set against the community of generation' which is the religion of the founding fathers, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and so on. "The monks chose

the holy community, the Protestants chose a relationship with a holy person, and the contemporary radicals sanctify the notion of the choice itself". They represent different types of 'margin' fighting the 'centre' which is the community of generation. But "to attack the community of generation so totally is to destroy one's own base, and to become as Luther sadly said of the Reformation - res unius aetatis - a thing of one generation, and... a religion solely composed of sons is by definition and social logic res unius aetatis".[12] The meanings of the counter culture then always presuppose a base which is a historical datum. No sect is conceivable without its appropriation of some item or value previously held or forgotten by the established base.

From the preceding discussion a conceptual scheme emerges, I hope, which is directly relevant to the changes and tensions taking place in contemporary Roman Catholicism. Old symbols must make sense in this industrial society and encompass, differentiate and synthesise modern multi-faced and fragmented social experience.

It is precisely at the cross roads between tradition and modernity, between old symbols of old authoritarian social structures and new social experience that the contemporary Roman Catholic is called to perform his bricolage.

---

12. David Martin, 'Christianity, Civic Religion, and Three Counter Cultures', The Human Context, vol,VI,no.3,1974, p.571, passim. A similar critique of the counter - culture is provided by Brian Wilson, Contemporary Transformations of Religion, Oxford University Press, 1976, pp. 114 - 116.

Chapter III

THE SOCIAL SETTING

Historical and social background

The fieldwork for this study was conducted between October 12, 1972 and November 28, 1973.

It is the purpose of this chapter to give a very general description of Formby and of the parish of St. Jerome as a social setting so as to provide the context in which the group's attitudes to the issues discussed in the previous chapter can be understood. The analysis of this context is intended only to deal with some external aspects of institutional religion and their relation to the social experience of the group, and does not aim at giving a strictly sociological account of this inter-relationship at every point in the life of the parish community. The analysis is, therefore, restricted to those external features of religious life which have become a matter of concern in contemporary Catholicism such as, for example, the relevance of the parish system.

Since the focus of this study is rather on individual attitudes to what these external aspects mean to them in relation to underlying beliefs, it seemed worth-while to pay attention to some social and historical factors which are part of Formby's past and present history and to relate them to the group's subjective consciousness.

Formby[1] is situated in the centre of the coastal area of south-west Lancashire, thirteen miles north of Liverpool and seven miles south of Southport. It lies on the westwardly directed point of land mid-way between the Ribble and Mersey estuaries. 'Formby Point', a rather large bulge

---

1. Much of the information about Formby's past and present was obtained from local sources but a very valuable one is Viking Village: The Story of Formby, ed. Edith Kelly, Formby Society, 1973. For up-to-date information about the present, see Formby: Lancashire Official Guide, issued by the authority of the Formby Urban District Council. Information about the religious history of Formby is contained in Old Catholic Lancashire, vol. III, by Dom. F.O. Blundell, Burns & Oates, London, 1941, pp. 133-140.

thrusting out into the Irish sea, is today a popular landmark as it provides the visitor with a fine view of the broad sandy beach and its undulating dunes curving gently either way for miles. Between this bulge and the town itself is a carefully guarded belt of pine woods, now a nature reserve, which together with the dunes form part of a large area rich in fauna and flora. On the landward side, flat farmlands stretch to the boundaries of Southport five miles northwards, to Crosby five miles southwards, and to Ormskirk eight miles eastwards. Formby itself lies a little below sea-level and its geographical history has been closely linked over the past centuries with the gradual incursion of sand dunes all along the coast of West Lancashire. It is even believed that Formby may have at one time developed a port of its own. The village of Formby was probably founded by Norse settlers in the early part of the tenth century. The name has its first mention in the Domesday Book compiled by William the Conqueror in 1086 ostensibly for finding out what the country 'inter Ripam et Mersham' was worth to him in taxation. The entry reads: "Three Thanes held Fornebei as three manors. There were four carucates of land. It was worth ten shillings." For many centuries the inhabitants lived an isolated life, cut off by forest and marshland.

Although the people, mostly fishermen and farmers, were ruled by a landowning aristocracy whose fluctuating fortunes are shrouded in obscurity, it appeared that from the thirteenth century onwards two manorial families began to dominate the social and religous life of their tenants. Documents of this period mention a family who took the name of 'Formby'. By 1631 at any rate the village had two lords: the Blundells of Ince whose residential mansions are still existing in Crosby though no longer inhabited by the members of the original family but whose name is a household word for Lancashire Catholics, and the Formbys' of Formby.[2] The Formby Family became members of the Protestant Church round 1720, whereas the Blundells

---

2. E. Kelly, op.cit., p. 53.

and their tenants living on their estates in Formby itself and outside remained attached to the Catholic faith. It was to be expected that when the Formbys' joined the Protestant Church they took with them many of their tenants dependent for their living on their protection. It is worth noting that during the Civil War and also during the Jacobite plot against the King, West Lancashire kept a steadfast allegiance to the Stuarts and the Catholic faith.[3] All the land from the Mersey in south Lancashire, up to the west coast to Lancaster, was said to be solidly Catholic. Allegiance to the Catholic faith appeared in this context to be dependent on social rather than on personal factors. Changing your faith was not only a matter of personal choice. It should be pointed out that tolerance towards Catholics in this part of the country resulted from a combination of social and political factors which apparently had little to do with one's personal religious conviction. Apart from the influence of the Catholic Blundells, the influence of the Protestant Derby Family,[4] the conservatism of the rural people and the geographical remoteness of this part of Lancashire can be seen as contributing factors in preserving the old faith.

A visible reminder of this past heritage is Formby Hall. Built some 800 years ago, it was the home of the manorial family of the Formbys' until the death of Mr. J.F.L. Formby in 1958. The mansion serves today as a holiday home for children from Liverpool. These facts mentioned throw an interesting light on the nature of Roman Catholicism in transformation since the Reformation. Roman Catholicism after the Reformation had eked out a precarious existence in isolated pockets throughout the country, its fate depending on the land owning families who might change their faith overnight, taking their dependents with them. As John D. Gay,[5] the modern geographer of religion in England observes: "If we could plot the distribution of all the Catholic

---

3. R.I. Stonor, Liverpool's Hidden Story, Billinge, Lancashire, 1957, p.13
4. F. Walker, Historical Geography of South West Lancashire, Chetham Society, 1939, p.62. Dom. F.O. Blundell, op.cit. p.133.
5. John D. Gay, The Geography of Religion in England, Duckworth, London, 1971, pp. 86, 88.

county families in 18th century England, we would have a good distribution map of Catholicism". The relative strength of the Catholic Church, for example, in Hampshire and Sussex was due, he suggests, to the dominant position of several wealthy Catholic families in these two counties. As he points out: "The relationship between the Catholic Church and the land owning gentry was the hallmark of English Catholics up to the early years of the 19th century". The Blundells in Crosby illustrate this point. They gave shelter to fugitive priests and allowed Catholics to attend Mass. Though Rom an Catholics were driven to worship in secret and had to attend services in Formby Hall, up to the early 1720s, and afterwards in Ince Blundell Hall, yet Roman Catholics as well as Protestants continued to use the graveyard of the old Anglican chapel even after its destruction.[6]

Sociologically speaking, the evidence from Formby's past when the inhabitants were living under the manorial system of government which only formally came to an end in 1905 when the village became an Urban District, suggests that the social organisation of the villagers has less to do with religion as such than with the political, social and economic status of the gentry. The story of English rural Catholicism of the recusancy period in general has not been told in full detail, but there is enough historical evidence to show that the type of Catholicism developed under the tutelage of the Catholic landowning gentry had a face of its own.[7] This appeared to be particularly so in the relationship between gentry and priest. For one thing, the survival of the Blundells in Lancashire seemed to be due as much to economic enterprise as loyalty to their faith. For another, the Blundells and the Formbys before the latter turned Protestant were in a position to have an important say in the shaping of the community from a religious point of view. It was not only that they provided security and protection for their tenants in economic terms, but also that they were

---

6. E. Kelly op.cit. p.54
7. John Bossy in his book The English Catholic Community: 1570-1850, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976, attempts to restore a lost dimension to the history of English Catholicism by exploring the complexity of the relationship of Catholicism and gentry.

instrumental in obtaining property for the building of churches or chapels apart from the fact that during penal days they could afford to have Mass said in their own homes.[8] Moreover, in the absence of a secular clergy the priests who came to the village to say Mass and to perform other sacramental duties were travelling priests, mostly Jesuits, who acted as private tutors and advisers to the gentry as well. There was then little room for clerical domination and paternalism which later on became associated with the secular clergy.

Due perhaps to the equilibrium of the manorial system of government, religious differences seemed to have had little significance in the village community. The villagers though they were religiously divided from the time of the Reformation onwards, at first not being greatly different in numbers, appear to have played an equal part in the affairs of the community in spite of the many disabilities under which Roman Catholics were suffering. Furthermore, round 1800 the village had only a population of 1,045 so that gemeinschaft relationships could thrive as the majority of the inhabitants shared the same occupational structure. This situation came to an end when the railway between Liverpool and Southport was established in 1848 which marked the process by which a closely-knit community like so many other English villages became absorbed in to the maelstrom of suburbanism. By 1900 the influx of residential commuters lifted the population to 5,000. After Formby had become an Urban District its population growth increased rapidly at a rate of 2% per year to 10,000 in 1951, rising to 17,000 in 1966 and during the early 70s to approximately 27,000. Together with the increase in population went a further increase of religious groupings. The village at first was shared by Anglicans and Roman Catholics who had built their parishes to accommodate their flock, the oldest being the Anglican church of St. Peter's (1770) and the Roman Catholic Church of Our Lady of Compassion (1864). After the opening of the railway church building increased. The Anglican church of St. Luke's was founded in 1885 to be shortly followed by that of Holy Trinity's in 1890. At about the same time, Non-Conformists built

8. E. Kelly, op.cit., p. 55.

a Methodist Church and established Formby Congregational Church. The Catholic Community could no longer be accommodated by the parish of Our Lady of Compassion, and so St. Anne's Church in Freshfield was opened in 1933 as a chapel-of-ease for Our Lady's parish, and in 1951 became the church of a separate parish. As we have seen, a third Catholic parish was added with the foundation of St. Jerome's in 1968.[9] Thus religion insofar as its outward manifestation is concerned came to be represented by eight churches as a result of population expansion.

Due to post-war changes in attitudes to inter-denominational relationships and the blurring of sectarian boundaries among the expanding community, the churches in the early 70s founded in Formby Association of Churches composed of the eight churches mentioned in order to project an image of christian-unity and co-operation. To what extent this collective venture has had an impact on the experience of the group will engage our attention later on when we report on their attitude to ecumenism. It is helpful at this point to consider the transformation of the village into a commuters' suburb by observing some qualitative changes which have taken place since 1848 in the social composition of the migrants. Taking for this purpose 1848 as one pole of the time-continuum when the first newcomers began to arrive and the mid-60s as the other pole when Formby witnessed a great increase in migration, it is possible to distinguish between two types of newcomers, each representing the evolution of industrial society and with it some of the outward changes in institutional religion. It would be futile, of course, to establish empirical oppositions between these ideal types of migration since continuity and discontinuity in life style

---

9. Church statistics (1965/1975) give the following population figures for the three parishes: Our Lady: 3,700; St. Anne's: 740, St. Jerome's: 1,400. Source: Pastoral Plan for the Archdiocese of Liverpool, 1976.

and occupation cannot be neatly conceptualised. Keeping this reservation in mind, the 'first' migrants, mostly professional and business people, who had discovered the rustic charm of Formby after the opening of the railway, built large houses in spacious grounds and gave employment to some of the locals as domestic staff. These people could afford to buy desirable property in whatever part of Formby they chose to settle without the interference of planning authorities. The majority of them came from Liverpool and Southport and were accustomed to city life with its amenities. While settling they were unwilling to accommodate themselves to the folkways of the villagers, or "sandgrounders" (those born with sand between the toes). Conflict as a result arose between them and village authorities over a number of issues such as paved roads, proper sanitation, electric lighting in the streets.[10] But though the newcomers were out to control to their advantage the affairs of the village, they did not attempt to turn it into a middle class showpiece. Nor were they interested in changing the local community into something else according to some ideal of neighbourhood and to improve its life style.

Social interaction and division appeared from this point of view to be limited. Villagers and newcomers met in worship recognising religion as a bond of unity which in its turn reinforced the hierarchy of social and economic values. But the social division became over time more differentiated as the rich newcomers represented commercial wealth which stood in vivid contrast to that of the landowning gentry to whom the villagers owned loyalty. It was only in 1905 that the lords of the manor abandoned their ancient rights. The Court Leet of the manor continued to meet until 1917 when it was summoned for the last time. Though the village population increased rapidly once it was drawn into the maelstrom of suburbanism, migration, until the first decade before the Second World War, took place gradually on a scale the village could cope with without

---

10. E. Kelly gives an interesting account of the struggles between "urbanites" and villagers led by the farmers and landowners, the former pressing for an Urban District Council, the latter fearing political control by the rich newcomers. Ibid., pp. 79-83.

experiencing a drastic upheaval. All this changed when during the early 60s Formby was once more discovered, but this time by a generation of newcomers who in the main represented the white-collar section. Though the landscape remained 'rural' in appearance, the newcomers brought with them ideas of community which were bound to have an effect on a widening of sub-community structures within the town. It would be helpful to describe how newcomers use a set of services already established and to see how they make them serve their interests. But this would take us too far. It is sufficient to note some salient features.

Characteristics of the contemporary social context

The first obvious fact is that unlike their predecessors the newcomers have settled in housing estates within specific geographical areas of the town planned in advance and away from the core of the village.

The areas in which the estates began to be built are in the jargon of the estate agents "select" and are under the control of planning authorities. The status symbol involved in this principle of selectivity refers to the ideology of an "ideal home" in the country and proclaims the acquired status of the commuters. Most of these new houses are owner-occupied.[1] But they come in all shapes and sizes, from the spacious detached to the little boxes, and a number of the new estates have open plan gardens. There are no fences or walls segregating the plots at the front of the houses unlike those surrounding the stately mansions built by previous generations of residents. Garages are not detached but form a part of the new houses, pointing to the fact that a car is an essential ingredient of family life and work. As a rule the garages are painted in colours different from those of the houses. The little gardens are immaculately kept, and display flowers and especially roses. There is little about them of the privacy and withdrawness characteristic of the older big houses, pointing to a world of aloofness from the outward spheres of work and leisure.

1. Formby has developed at a relatively faster rate since the last war than any authority in South-West Lancashire other than those which accepted overspill. Moreover, it is an area which was almost exclusively privately developed. Between mid-1961 and mid-1968, over 3,124 dwellings were built, all except 54 built by private enterprise. Estates are still spreading, and in 1973 at the rate of 250 houses a year. See K. Pickett, 'Migration in the Merseyside Area', in Merseyside: Social and Economic Studies, The University of Liverpool, 1970, pp. 125-144.

The arrangement of space in these new dwellings does not only signify a framework within which a suburban family has to live, but also reflects - up to a point - the occupational structure of their inhabitants. Apart from changes in housing norms in the 60s, they have been designed mainly to house commuters whose daily life is divided between working outside the estate and life at home.

Unlike the social structure of Banbury described by Margaret Stacey,[2] in which there was a clear division between the old and new community when the factory plant was built, no such division could be detected in Formby where the old community of migrants and villagers had gradually merged into one more or less uniform community. Formby has no working class to speak of.[3]

Employment and level of salaries in Formby depend less on local organisations insofar as migrant commuters are concerned. Nor is there any longer a 'rural community' in the traditional sense of the word, although there are enough visible signs left to show that Formby was once a village.

Generally speaking, the whole social structure insofar as the new housing estates are concerned does not so much mirror a break with local traditions as with the accentuation of the professional and managerial elements characteristic of the migrant population as a whole. Community life from this angle has so many overlapping activities that it would be impossible to sort out what local values are shared by the migrant community. Formby has an enormous variety of clubs and voluntary organisations catering for every taste and hobby. Until some thirty years ago most recreational activities were carried out under the aegis of the Churches. For example, one of the two cinemas, the Queen's was opened in the premises of a Catholic Youth Club.

---

2. Margaret Stacey, Tradition and Change, OUP., 1960, pp. 167-68, passim.
3. The 1966 census shows that nearly half of the occupied men in Formby were in service industries and only one - third in manufactoring.
   Source: Sample Census, 1966.

Incidentally, even today there are more parish Churches than pubs! Today there are many associational activities in Formby operating on a voluntary basis. What they require of their members is a recognition of their goals. Whether or not individuals in fact participate is thought to be irrelevant as individual choice is taken for granted. Because mobility is high,[4] participation is subject to people's needs and aspirations. It is taken for granted that you drop your membership if a particular organisation does not suit your tastes. No blame is attached to switching loyalities. This point was made clear to the investigator when he was trying to find out what voluntary associations mean to those who participate in them.

The so-called 'rural' people - of whom a substantial core is still surviving in spite of the continual growth in numbers are not visible to the extent that they are a separate sub-group inhabiting a world different from that of the residential commuters. While visiting some of the old Formbyite families - whose names are on the recusancy lists - the investigator did not find an appreciable difference in attitude in their definition of the social reality of the town compared to that given by some residents who at the time of the investigation had lived only a number of years in Formby. The difference between "them" and "us", the former being the villagers, the latter the newcomers, did not appear to hinge on social divisions or on different perception of inequality. Some of the answers during the preliminary interviews taken prior to that of the sample indicated a consensus on this perceived lack of socal divisions in the town. A native born family, for example, said: 'We are not conscious of class here since we all are more or less in the same boat.' A commuter, who worked in Liverpool, though he described the estate jokingly as the "dormitory of Liverpool" said: 'Who is a surburbanite or a villager nowadays? It is not that commuters are on the move and the locals stay put living a life different from us. What we all have in common is the outward frame of affluence and social position whether you live in a modern house or in a cottage.' In fact, everybody talks about "the village" as though it exists out there in a tangible shape, but, as was found during the period of fieldwork, when people

4. According to the 1966 census 25% of the Formby residents changed their address between 1965 and 1966. See K. Pickett, op.cit., p.128.

said "I am off to the village" they simply referred to the shopping area which consists of a block of arcaded shops around tree-lined "Chapel Lane". A new scheme at the time was afoot to expand this area by pedestrianizing it and by introducing more trees, shrubs in tubs, cafés and fountains, together with a children's playground. A further scheme on the drawing-board of the developers in 1973 was to turn the vast acreage of sand dunes, pinewoods and sea shore into a huge Coastal Park with all the modern amenities for tourists. This plan was seen as a threat to the "select" tag. The image of the village is thus bandied about by different groups, each having their own idea of what the town should look like so as to stimulate a freer play of social relationships according to the assumptions implied in this image. Some throw up their hands in horror, others welcome it and others again shrug their shoulders in indifference.

Though the concept of associational society is dominant here, it is not simply an 'either/or' affair on the lines of the Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft dichotomy.[5] The overriding impression obtained during the fieldwork was that primary and communal relationships were present in varying degrees in the many cultural and social activities. The sociological assumption that Gemeinschaft relationships in industrial society are on the way out and being replaced by those of the Gesellschaft type ought to be taken with a pinch of salt. If it is true that the old village community had only a limited number of relationships circumscribed by kinship, religion and the work-milieu, the present community has potential access to a vast number of relationships. However, the many voluntary associations in existence reflect the values of the middle class community and their appreciation of leisure. There are, for example, some "high-brow" societies the purpose of which is to preserve the amenities of Formby and its myth of a rural paradise and to prevent it from being absorbed into the neighbouring conurbation. In sport, the emphasis is on cricket, golf and tennis and less so on football, though the latter has two clubs. In the field of entertainment there is not so much to offer. As E. Kelly puts it: "Perhaps the Formby atmosphere is more suited to cultural

5. For a summary of British rural community studies, see Ronald Frankenberg, Communities in Britain, Penguin Books, 1966.

pursuits and the more active sports. Maybe the older folk are happy with their television, and the younger ones enjoy themselves in smaller and less advertised groups."[6] Talking to some teenagers, the investigator found that facilities for the young are considerably less than in the city of Liverpool or Southport. What facilities do exist are seen as general framework in which one can pursue one's interest, strike up personal relationships and find satisfaction of one sort or another.

Neighbourhood solidarity in this context is neither geographical nor purely tied to group-interests, but is something abstract. Though people are likely to join their own kind in the pursuit of social activities, neither religion as such nor an internalised opposition between old and new residents appeared to act as decisive factors in the social composition of associations. Durkheim's insight that the shared experience of society structures the internal consciousness of the individual to match that of the collectivity has a limited application in this sphere. What was observed here was a continual mix of people representing different sections of the community. Leaving aside for the time being socio-religious or, strictly speaking, parish societies and associations, it was observed that both navtive born Formbyites and newcomers occupy important key positions on the committees. For example, the Formby Support Group of the Leonard Cheshire Foundation Homes for the Sick, founded in 1968, showed an extraordinary range of people and group-interests drawn from every section of the community crisscrossing the lines of religion, occupational status and social prestige. Those serving on its committee were people in whom an elusive social hierarchy became visible without reflecting their position in its formal structure. A member of this committee, a Roman Catholic, describing how this organisation is related to religion and the community, said: 'Several groups have a stake in this charitable venture, but though each of them wants to preserve its own interest, there is little evidence to show that they attempt

6. E. Kelly, op.cit., p.107

to exclude each other from the benefits they hope to get or to press for benefits to which they feel themselves entitled.' Since social inequality between the various strata of Formby society is less marked than in those with a variegated class structure, it was not surprising that solidarity and exclusiveness in the associational field was barely visible. As already implied, this does not mean that the old values associated with the village community have altogether disappeared or that the new form of Gesellschaft relation has swept away the traditional ties of kinship and face-to-face relationships. This proved far from being the case in some related areas such as the status of the family.

On the basis of the sample interview, apart from what was observed during the course of participant observation, I found that it was extremely difficult to reach tenable conclusions on the rise of familism[7] with an increased emphasis upon familial relationships of a nuclear type and a decline in the importance of the older kinship network. Research on secularisation, and post-war community studies undertaken in the U.S.A. andin this country, have come up with the observation that the suburban family, apart from being isolated from the wider society, has become egocentric, atomised, impersonal, where relationships are alleged to be superficial with the family withdrawing into a "private sphere". While visiting the Catholic families of the sample, the investigator found that role-differentiation within the families was clearly evident within the context of husband-wife relationships connected with a divison of labour. Furthermore, role-differentiation became most apparent during the interviews themselves in which both husbands and wives irrespective of age and social class took complementary roles in expressing their views. Such behaviour patterns in our view have little to do with the question whether or not the suburban family is a new "form of life". In fact, flexibility in the interchange of husband-wife roles was equally observed in the case of middle-aged couples who were

7. Thomas Luckmann, op.cit., p.112-114. For a detailed account of this point, see David Thorns, Suburbia, Paladin 1973, whose critical analysis of the components of surburbia breaks through popular conceptions.

not belonging to the commuter society, and whose age structure did not coincide with that of the newly-weds.[8] As a result, the identification of a family-centred ethic with a corresponding withdrawal into the private sphere appeared to us somewhat tendentious. Again, the importance of house improvement may well be attributed to the so-called ethos of familism of the suburban dweller and to that of status-competition. But in our view the emphasis on "good-housing" and living in the "countryside" appeared to be part of the idealization of the village. The pre-occupation with improving the house did not seem to come from the town itself, but from outside influences mediated by the media and advertising agencies. After all, everybody in Formby takes a pride in fashioning his house according to prescribed and ascribed images.

The many visible ways in which Formbyites as a whole interact with each other formally and informally did not disclose an easily recognisable pattern of loyalties and attachments insofar as family life is concerned. Because religious and social values converge in so many areas of public and private life, it proved an arduous task to grasp the many convolutions and involutions involved in the work and leisure sphere of families. As we have seen, there is plethora of voluntary associations which act as buffer zones between primary and secondary groups in which participation is fleeting. This factor of participation or non-participation could not serve as a reliable index of loyalties. Moreover, the churches in Formby provide for their members a wide range of social activities and services which are not competing with secular associations in the pursuit of goals. To take another obvious example: car ownership is high and so is the use of the telephone. Both are means for communication between members of the family and their kin, whether they are physically near or not. Just as choice of residence is a privilege of the middle class, so is there a choice in the use of car and phone in contacting relatives and friends implying the principle of selectivity.

---

8. Less than one third of the sample were native born Formbyites with strong attachment to the local traditions of family life.

It could be maintained that this form of communication is not merely a substitute for but an extension of physical contact in the context of proximity. There are for all members of the community countless opportunities to strike up new relationships with others beyond those of the immediate neighbourhood. During our fieldwork we were invited to many house-parties, coffee sessions, christening parties and so on. Apart from formal occasions organised by clubs and voluntary associations, there is an endless round of such informal meetings. They are part of social networks and reveal more than anything else the values of sub-groups, family interests and the ways in which people evaluate each other from different angles. In order to illustrate this point two such informal occasions are described: the first was organised by a native born family (third generation), the second was held in the estate by a commuter family who had been living there for a number of years. The investigator was invited to both parties.

While attending the party of the 'locals', it became apparent to the investigator that the people invited were not all of the same status. The party included people of different occupational backgrounds. What they had in common was that they knew each other intimately because of family traditions in worship. Some of the people in the party had no car and yet turned out to be members of the local golf club. Everybody was relaxed, and there was no effort in putting on appearances. The host, in fact, volunteered to take people back by car. The chit-chat going on had endless allusions to a whole world of shared values.

In contrast, the party in the housing estate turned out to be a different affair. People were conscious of their position in the community. Most of the people invited were the 'right' people belonging to the same social group in terms of occupation. Whereas in the former case, the people interacted with each other easily, in the latter the people were conscious of each other's roles. As one guest said in confidence: 'The whole thing is a con. You are expected to get to know each other; but everybody is wearing a mask.'

This discussion has shown that social relationships in Formby are very fluid. Extensive participant observation failed, for instance, to register any special communal roles attributed to any particular member of the community at large. Relationships at the various intermediate levels such as between families and between various associations were also found to be in a flux. Yet a certain degree of stability of relations within specific groups exists, but even these relationships did not seem to give an outlook of permanence. Let us now see this situation in the context of the parish of St. Jerome itself.

St. Jerome's as a socio-religious institution

As was said earlier, St. Jerome's was established in 1968 to cater for the Catholic overspill from Merseyside. Though the parish is essentially one designed for commuters, its ecclesiastical boundaries were drawn somewhat arbitrarily across pre-existing civil, social and religious divisions in the town. Thus the parish arose by cutting slices offone of the older Catholic parishes in that a number of families were transferred from there to the new one without their consultation. Some of these transferred families were part of the sample. One of them said: 'We have divided loyalties. We go to Mass at St. Jerome's, but our heart is in Our Lady of Compassion where we got married and had our children baptised.' As a result, the new parish is a mixture of old conceptions of territoriality reminiscent of the urban parish and of new ones which aim at making the parish the symbol of a specific social grouping. There is only one priest in charge. The presbytery is indistinguishable from the rest of the housing estate, but there is as yet no parish church so that services are held in a temporary hall which serves purposes other than those normally associated with Mass attendance and the reception of the Sacraments. People come together in the hall for discussions, for having coffee or a drink, or for a dance. The hall in a sense signifies the blurring of the customary boundaries between the profane and sacred in terms of space.

As we will see in the appropriate place in this study below, the lack of a church building had some effect on the respondents' attitudes to the new liturgy of the Mass. The hall has a seating capacity for about three hundred people who attend Mass on Sunday. It should be remembered that the three Catholic parishes in Formby are within striking distance of each other and offer similar services more or less at the same time. Though all three parishes follow the liturgy of the New Mass, the older parishes have retained some of the devotional practices like, for example, the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament after Mass or the Benediction service in the afternoon.

Formal Structure

If we were to follow the usual distinction made in the past about the sociology of the parish between formal and informal organisation, the former having the priest and the presbytery as the visible centre of the parish community, the latter being a medley of informal relationships in which individuals participate with varying degrees of commitment, it becomes apparent that St. Jerome's, to the extent that it is a structure, falls between two stools. On the one hand, it has retained some formal organisations like the Mothers' Union, a Catholic Youth Club, the Parents'/Teachers' Association also called 'Friends of St. Jerome's '. The latter is separate from Formby Catholic Parents' Assocation shared by the three parishes. On the other hand it provides a vast range of opportunities for informal meetings and contacts among the parishioners. These opportunities include a wide spectrum of activities: annual dances, garden fetes, outings, jumble sales, flower shows, fund-raising for charitable purposes, various discussion groups and so forth. Furthermore, if we make a distinction between a 'parish society' which is a durable structure on an associational basis whose purpose is to work for the spiritual and material wellfare of defined groups (such as, for example, the traditional St. Vincent de Paul's Society) and other 'parish activities', the latter did not constitute a basis for uniting together the members of St. Jerome's as a community. Few of the formal associations

reflect the solidarity of the social composition of the traditional parish community. Whereas the older parishes have continued to maintain associations. like the Legion of Mary and the Catholic Men's Society, St. Jerome's as a new parish has cut such associational ties. Instead of thinking of the parish as a social system jostling along with other systems with certain limited and clearly defined goals, it would be better from this angle to see it as an open-ended structure in the process of transformation, caught halfway between traditionalism and modernism.

On being asked to what extent respondents take part in any of the parish organisations mentioned, 75% said that they did not and 25% said that they took some part in them. The 75% dismissed them as being purely 'social' without having any relation to the values of the parish and of religion. Parish organisations were seen as contexts for making friends among co-religionists so as to foster cliques. The general comment was that these organisations close people in and make them inward looking. Being a member puts a label on you and a mark of exclusiveness. One respondent, being an executive of a sports' club, said:'There was a need in the past to organise Catholics in order to help them to get benefits through other groups. The sort of solidarity which grew out of this need is no longer required.'

Those who said that they took part in parish activities were of the opinion that there is a point in giving Catholics an opportunity for feeling at home with co-religionists in some way or other. Respondents in this group said that they were members of the Catholic Mothers' Union, The Parents'/ Teachers' Association, the Covenant (a fund-raising activity), Youth Clubs and so forth. They felt that participation strengthens one's loyalty to the Church, but at the same time they believed that a change in outlook and policies was called for and that these clubs should include non-Catholics as well. They pointed out that there is no close correlation between participation in parish activities and participation in friendship groups who are solely composed of fellow-Catholics in and outside the parish. This

observation was borne out by the fact that many Catholics from the three parishes take part in other social activities in the town and recognise each other as Catholics, though they might not be active at all in the formal affairs of their respective parishes. Five of the key-informants among this group admitted that participation by those who considered themselves as committed members is a fluid affair insofar as numbers are concerned. An official of the Mothers' Union, for example, in describing her experience of this organisation over a number of years remarked that meetings were not well attended because of the waning interest of those who joined. 'You are left', she said, 'with old-timers, married women, who still regard the Mothers' Union on old fashioned lines and do not appreciate the views and attitudes of newly-wed women who soon lose interest when they discover that it has little to offer them.' The same complaint was voiced by members of some other parish organisations.

While participation in activities used to be some useful index of members' loyalty to the parish, it was abundantly clear from the replies that the parish system is regarded with apathy. Even those who defended its value saw its usefulness for very few people. As one committed member said: 'Those who participate are already interested and do not really need them. Their involvement has little to do with the purposes of these activities.'

Throughout, there were no ideas on how these social activities should serve communal interests. Since most of these organisations are already shared by the other two parishes, it was felt that there was no need to duplicate them in St. Jerome's.

Looking at the answers in their context it became apparent that for the majority of respondents participatory behaviour within organised frameworks, whether of a secular or a religious nature, did not carry approval and conviction in the light of the mental climate of the community where 'doing your own thing' is valued. This sentiment was forcibly expressed

by a keen and committed member of the parish council when, in summing up his experience of the life of formal and informal activities in the parish, he said: 'People want to use the parish for their own ends. If its services agree with their expectations, well and good; if not, they lose their interests at a drop of a hat. Organisational rules are all the time contested and the purposes of parish activities and clubs are forever questioned with demands for improvements.' Implicit in those responses was the tacit recognition that the suburban parish can no longer serve as a focus of the local community. It was tentatively suggested on several occasions during the course of fieldwork that the structure of the parish can no longer be conceived as expressing the traditional relationship between the priest and the people. However, they saw a role for the priest in a social context as the informal leader of some of the informal group activities. This suggestion made sense all the more so since - as we have seen - St. Jerome's has no specifically defined parish organisation as such in order to project an image of its social composition. The formal structures described are already shared by the other two parishes and are in a true sense 'interparochial'. Moreover, an important factor is the existence of the Formby Association of Churches which has set into motion a new set of social relations between the Catholic parishes and the non-Catholic Churches in the community. Because the other two parishes embody older traditions in organisation and devotional practices, it was not surprising that St. Jerome's in the images and conceptions of the commuters presents something diffuse and refracted insofar as its social image is concerned. Nevertheless, it was discovered that the ideal of a territorial parish has not altogether died even among some of the commuters who because of their past connections with urban Liverpool Catholicism showed familiarity with closely-knit parish communities.[1]

---

1. In a recent study of a Roman Catholic parish in Liverpool, carried out by R.E.S. Tanner, it was found that the parishioners remembered the pastoral system of house visiting.
R.E.S. Tanner, 'Reactions to Pastoral Change', Heythrop College Social Survey, Memorandum, 7, 1970, pp. 21 - 22.

The inquiry was intended to be focussed on discovering what the prevailing social practice of the Mass means to the members of the group in view of the fact that the Mass itself, both as part of a belief and a value system, has undergone a transformation over the last ten years or so. In chapter VI an analysis is given of what the new Mass meant to them. It is sufficient here to say something about this social practice in the context of Formby's community and that of St. Jerome's. One of the findings reported so far was that participation in social practices of any kind has lost its constraining power and has become more an individual matter. While the individuals appeared by no means entirely free from the power of the group, they have acquired a considerable amount of independence in making decisions in many vital areas of their social life. Given this situation, it could be surmised that religious commitment in the matter of Mass-attendance would be following, at least to some extent, the same trend. That this trend is embodied in Mass-attendance became apparent in observed behaviour and received confirmation in the replies to the question what going to Mass meant for them when considered as a social practice. An attempt was made to check whether the people attending Mass in the parish hall on an ordinary Sunday did in fact belong to the parish. This proved a very difficult task because the investigator had already learnt indirectly that Catholic Formbyites 'shop around' and look upon their respective parishes as 'service-stations' or a kind of 'supermarket' where you can have your pick from available services and devotional practices. On a chosen Sunday the investigator found the parish hall packed with worshippers attending the Sunday morning Mass. But a rough check made with the help of a parishioner of St. Jerome's - who had an intimate knowledge of 'who is who' in the parish showed that roughly a third out of the three hundred present were strangers in the sense that they could not be classified as parishioners of St. Jerome's. It happened that this particular Sunday was a sunny day in the summer when tourists, week-enders, visiting relatives and people passing by in their cars on their way to the beach mixed with worshippers. Non-commitment to worship in one

particular parish was confirmed by the respondents themselves. When they were asked whether they felt obliged to attend Mass at St. Jerome's most of them did not think so. On the general church rule to attend Mass on Sunday, also many of the respondents did not seem particularly committed. 29% said that they went "occasionally"; 57% were in their words "regulars", never giving Mass a 'miss'; 8% said that they did not go at all and had ceased being Mass-goers without having spurned their religion, and the remaining 6% were some very old people who were unable to go to Mass unless they were taken and those individuals of the sample who were non-Catholics, married to a Catholic partner. The latter said that they used to accompany their Catholic partners but found little relish in doing so. But the majority of both "occasionals" and "regulars", roughly 50% claimed that the matter of attending Mass at St. Jerome's or somewhere else was dictated by criteria of choice depending on a great number of personal and social factors. A few quotes are in order to understand how these choices were found to be structured by the milieu of the community. Taking those who answered in the affirmative to the extent that Sunday observance for them was 'a must', it became clear that even for them the obligation has lost much of its conventional force. A middle-aged couple said: "We never miss out on Mass, not because the Church says we are in conscience bound, but because we want to. We feel free to go whenever we like to go." Or consider the replies of some families transferred from one of the older parishes to the new parish. An old family, for example, while approving of the new-style of religious services in the parish, commented: "We belong to St. Jerome's, but we attend Mass in Our Lady's because this church represents for us the religion of our Fathers who have used it for generations." A young family, the husband being a commuter, said: "Yes, we go al right, but mainly because of the children. What else is left in religion for them if we do not go? Something has to be passed on to them." The same sort of sentiment was found with the occasional attenders. Criteria for attending or not attending, when and where, depended according to them on factors which have got to do with mood, disposition, priorities in the family as to how the Sunday should be spent, outings, visiting relatives, changing views on religion, and so forth.

A young boy said: "My parents go every Sunday, but I and my brothers and sisters go whenever we like going. Our parents do not force us." It must also be said here that the traditional universal duty of attendance was not in any way enforced upon the respondents by the priests.

There were several other ways in which individuals tended to tailor their expectations of Sunday Mass in line with their class positions, and which were not entirely determined by their being members of the group. But confining ourselves to the data, Mass attendance, when considered as a social practice, showed that to a large extent its obligatory character has lost its force along the continuum of differential choices. More importantly, the symbol of the territorial parish was clearly in a state of disarray in that Mass attendance did not seem to be associated with belonging to a particular parish. Being a Mass attender is one thing, but attending or not attending in a circumscribed locality is quite another. Besides the reported attachments by individuals to the older parishes in Formby, the theological view of Sunday Mass as the paramount expression of the Church as community, gathering people of varying wealth, class, personal faith and commitment, did not tally in the light of the above findings with the observed reality. It is doubtful, to say the least, whether the new emphasis on the parish as the rightful expression of the 'People of God' on a local level, symbolising the visible presence of the Church universal, carries conviction among those interviewed. It was hard to look at a Sunday Mass on an ordinary Sunday in St. Jerome's without realising that those attending constituted, as a rough estimate, a quarter of the Catholics in the parish. Apart from this, the findings suggest that the majority did not see participation in the Sunday Mass in their parish as a terribly important part of their lives. For one thing, the new liturgy surrounding the Mass is meant to create community: is this possible when there are different concepts as to how parish life should be organised in a mobile society? "Community in faith and values", as a member of the parish council expressed it, "is not enough through the mediation of the visiting priest who has to cope with a floating population

whose ties with the parish are ephemeral in that they are not born in Formby nor married in the parish church in which to have their children christened." This point was taken up by some informants who were engaged in the Friends of St. Jerome's, a loosely organised association whose purpose is to help migrant Catholics to get their bearings in integrating themselves in the parish.

One of them interviewed at some length said: "The question of the size of the parish has become totally irrelevant. The parish from start to finish does not coincide with a natural grouping of Catholics on recognisable lines. If you want community in the old sense, it has to begin with small groups sharing some goal or stated purpose, but commuters settling down here do not want to be caught in this old fashioned type of community life from which they have moved. They want to share the wider experiences accruing from career and position on the social ladder." Furthermore, there are in Formby secular institutions such as the Community Association whose main aim is to provide newcomers with information about community activities and people involved in them. Community cannot be sought either as a goal or a means, but results from continual interaction between parishioners sharing more or less the same goals. There have to be reasons for the existing parish structures which cannot exist for their own sakes.

Having given a profile of St. Jerome's as a socio-religious institution, we are now in a better position to study the social and psychological facts which are characteristic of the religious beliefs and values held by the group and to penetrate a little deeper their impact on their religious consciousness. If we look at institutional religion as a social and cultural expression, it tells us more about a particular society than about itself, and, if we regard it as a personal expression, it tells us more about the people who make use of it than about what it is itself. In either case we have no direct access to the inner dimension of religious faith.

Chapter I V

TRANSFORMATIONS OF BELIEF

Introductory remarks

The previous chapter provided a profile of the social conditions of the group and their external connection with the central belief system of the church through the parish system. What emerged from the inquiry so far is that the life style of the group has an obvious bearing on the ways in which they justified their support of the parish system, but it could not be inferred from these accounts to what extent their commitment in terms of participation and non-participation was related to the belief system underlying the parish system. It proved a difficult task to sort out what type of belief influenced their attitudes to parish associations. Their attitudes, for example, to the value of obligatory behaviour contained a mixture of motivations derived from different values at work in the life of a middle class community. It would have been presumptuous to conclude from this that the group was influenced by secular beliefs and values. But a different interpretation could be put on the ways in which they valued obligation.

One could say that their minimal involvement is a further sign of secularization whereby religious institutions lose control over their members. But it could be plausibly argued too that their disavowal of a 'must' in the sphere of attachment to the parish system and Mass attendance shows an appreciation of the internal development of religion itself with its emphasis on individual freedom and responsibility so that religious participation can be based more firmly on purely spiritual grounds. Either way, the findings were so inconclusive as to suggest that institutional beliefs have altogether ceased as a base for religious behaviour and have been replaced by secular ones.

In this chapter the theme of how respondents are viewing their relationship to institutional beliefs in the context of their experience of Roman Catholicism is taken up and analysed on the basis of the model explained in chapter 2. Its purpose here is to describe what sorts of meaning the respondents are likely to attribute to these beliefs, known as 'doctrines' and to give an account of the conditions under which they share these beliefs. More specifically, the concern in this chapter is with locating the cognitive beliefs of the group with reference to the Creed which for all Christians is the 'charter' for religious behaviour, and serves as the symbolum fidei par excellence. It is pertinent at this point to make some reservations. By taking cognitive beliefs as expressed in the Creed as the object of inquiry and the ways in which individuals are perceiving its content, no attempt is made to cover superstitious or other types of belief which may exist alongside institutional ones inside the group.

There is enough empirical evidence to show that people in complex societies hold a great variety of beliefs, often contradictory ones, and that beliefs held by individuals who belong to the same religion may bear little relationship to official ones. Keith Thomas in his monumental study of pre-industrial England has showns that people in the past were alike in this regard.[1] But unless we know the connections people make between these various types of belief, it is not so easy to see why they should be labelled 'irrational' if the people share a world view which allows the manipulation of the magical by means other than those provided by popular religion. Bearing this restriction in mind, the inquiry does not concern itself with forms of Catholic Folk beliefs and practices as such except indirectly.

---

1. Keith Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971. See also Peter Laslett, The World We Have Lost, London : Methuen, 1965, pp. 71 -2. Discussion of evidence on religious beliefs of English population as a whole can be found in Martin B. (1968),'Comments on some Gallup Poll Statistics', A Sociological Yearbook of Religion, 1968, 1, ed. D.A.Martin.

By stressing in this chapter the cognitive aspects of the Apostles' Creed, another important point should be made. This is that credal beliefs are undoubtedly part of the total cognitive system in terms of which believers are supposed to make sense of their experience. But it would be a sociological mistake to see them as pure cognitions hanging in the air.

Mary Douglas in her criticism of a structuralist approach to myth argues correctly that it is not permissible "to provide an analysis of an interlocking system of categories of thought which has no demonstrable relation to the social life of the people who think in these terms."[2] It is surely a necessary task to show how a particular myth, or body of myths, reflects the social life of the people who possess it and whether they think in these terms. But apart from the empirical question as to how people of a given culture can be shown to have access to the interlocking system of categories of thought, it is equally important to pay attention to the myths themselves. A case in point is the internal transformation of the Catholic belief system and its relation to life. It was pointed out in chapter 1 that many of the beliefs which till recently were thought to be immutably fixed are on the move as though they have a life of their own. Though it is recognised here along with Bryan Wilson that theologically meanings are "also socially evolved and perhaps socially determined" and that "men's conceptions of God are socially prescribed..",[3] it must be emphasised that an analysis of people's attitudes to beliefs in the contemporary context of Catholicism needs also to take into account the changes which are instigated by the Church.

This being so it is postulated that there is a feedback between beliefs as they transform themselves and their social acceptance by the group. For this reason an attempt is made to discover some of the interconnections between them in what the respondents have to say. This requires a double movement

---

2. Mary Douglas, 'The Healing Rite' in Man, 1970, p. 303.

3. Bryan Wilson, Religion in Secular Society, Pelican Book, 1969, p.13.

in the analysis of their attitudes. On the onehand, it is necessary to treat the respondents in the words of Barthes as "the reader of the myths themselves who must reveal their essential function"[4] by showing how their reading corresponds to the interests of the group as a whole. On the other, individual and collective variants do not make much sense if they are isolated from the myths whose meanings have a value in their own right, whether or not individuals are fully aware of changes in the message they are intended to convey. This is particularly so in the field of ritual beliefs and practices where transformations sometimes bear on traditional frameworks, sometimes on new ways of coding them, and even in the case of the Eucharist on the message itself. As was pointed out in chapter 1, much of the confusion in Catholic thought in the post-Vatican II period is due to the fact that too much has happened at once at different levels of the institution without apparent connections. If one were to value the structuralist point of view in myth analysis such as has been, for example, undertaken by Levi-Strauss, one would find a very ironic situation with respect to the study of beliefs.

As was shown in chapter 2, Lévi-Strauss is not bothered with the thinking subject at all since his interest lies with the thinking process taking place in the myths, in their reflection upon each other and in their interrelation. While our interest lies precisely in giving the signifying subject his due, it must be admitted that one ought not to lose sight of the theological oppositions going on between different categories of beliefs as they have become manifest in the relevant literature among which the conciliar documents take a central position. In this sense Lévi-Strauss' earliest claim to show "not how men think in myths, but how myths ope rate in men's minds without their being aware of the fact"[5] has a relevant application. If this point

---

4. R. Barthes, op. cit., p. 129.

5. Lévi-Strauss, The Raw and the Cooked (Le Crue et le Cuit, 1964, Librairie Plon) tr. by John & Doreen Weightman, Harper and Row, New York, 1969, p. 12.

is granted, we will have a better understanding of how Catholics are coping with their beliefs.

It is proposed that the analysis follows the conceptual model of bricolage of which it is an integral part. When applied to beliefs, the model presupposes that privatization occurs among the group, but within the parameters of cognitive choices in so far as they are available in the local community. The privatization process, however, is not to be conceived in terms of relative deprivation theories such as has been espoused by Glock and other sociologists.

Privatization of beliefs is presumed to take place on the premise that hardly anything can be privatized unless there is a common basis from which deviations proceed. Enough has been said in the preceding chapter to indicate the matrix from which the respondents are likely to take their position vis-a-vis credal beliefs. The description of the interrelationship of religion and middle class values furnishes a rough guide line in understanding respondents' conceptions in this field.

In order to keep their replies within the limits of the inquiry, it was unavoidable to select answers representative of the group.
The use of language dealing with belief, is, as Rodney Needham[6] has demonstrated, extremely complex, so that sorting out even the most crucial linguistic conventions and tracing whatever relationship they might have to one another in a speech community is an impossible task. For this reason, it was left to the respondents to articulate as best as they could their own interpretations. Besides, no effort was made to explore further the experiential sources of the senses of God on their part. The investigator is here in full agreement with Bowker[7] who argues that the senses of God are not necessarily fully

---

6. R. Needham, Belief, Language and Experience, 1972, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

7. J. Bowker, op.cit., p. 23 ff.

determined by the social as such.

If for heuristic purposes an analogy is to be used to illustrate the process of bricolage, let us take our cue from a philosopher who compares belief to a map of the world in the heads of those who make use of it. Individual beliefs are like so many sub-maps "by which", as D. Armstrong shows, "we steer".[9] Credal doctrines can be compared to such maps in the light of which believers are prepared to act. To speak in terms of Armstrong:

"The great belief maps will be much like the maps of old, containing innumerable errors, fantasies and vast blank spaces. It may even involve contradictory representations of portions of the world. This great map, which is continually being added to and continually being taken away from as long as the believer lives, is a map within his mind." In the case of ordinary maps a distinction can be drawn between the map itself, and the map's reader's interpretation of the map. No such distinction can be accepted in the case of beliefs since our beliefs are our interpretations of mythological reality. Beliefs are to be thought of as maps which carry their own interpretation of reality within themselves. This is only an analogy, but it helps to bring out more clearly what the inquiry is about.

---

9. D.M. Armstrong, Belief Truth and Knowledge, Cambridge University Press, 1973, p.3.
See also K. E. Boulding, The Image, Ann Arbor Paper back, 1961, pp. 65-69.

Beliefs about the fatherhood of God

The Christian Churches have undeniably held some specific doctrines about God as a triune being. A summary of these doctrines is contained in the Creed, the recital of which is a familiar feature of Christian worship. It is only recently that Catholics recite the Creed in the vernacular during the Mass.

The first credal proposition is about the fatherhood of God and serves as a pivot for further statements about the kind of fatherhood implied. There have been differences in the conception of the Father, of the Son and of their relationship. Since 'Father' and 'Son' are not only archtypes of human culture, but also, in the social experience of people, real people, there have been various forms of anthropomorphic admixtures to the perception of God as a Father. The sonship of Christ also has been understood in diverse ways. Finally, the Holy Spirit has been conceived as a spirit who is not named.

The sociologists Glock and Stark[1] in their research on American adults' belief in a personal God are correct in insisting that within the Judaeo - Christian tradition these beliefs are central tenets of the Christian faith. Yet they assume perhaps too readily that both the Churches and their members have accepted these doctrines in a literal sense. The belief in God has obviously absorbed over time many social elements related to people's practical experience of fatherhood.

While it is true to say with Trevor Ling[2] that Judaism, Christianity and Islam have for several centuries accepted the belief "of the absolute potentate who is affirmed to be the creator - deity", the historical development of the doctrine shows that the idea of "the absolute potentate" has been considerably

---

1. Glock and Stark, American Piety, 1968, pp. 22,23.

2. Trevor Ling, A History of Religion East and West, Macmillan:London, 1968, p. 426.

modified in that the power of the Father is closely connected with sonhood and spirithood which differentiate the notion of the Father. Yet both in the Creed and in worship the 'Father' is always addresses first, and even in Christological prayers in which Christ is the principal addresses, the word 'Father' keeps it central position.

This being the background, the respondents were asked to express their views on the meaningfulness of the image of God's fatherhood. As could be expected, they were, at first, reluctant to talk about it. They found it difficult to express themselves as the word 'God' covers such a vast range of meanings for contemporary man. 20 respondents said that the word had become a label for them without any content. A typical answer was : 'the word God is an empty one; it has too many confusing meanings.' Another respondent commenting on the style of life of young families in the housing estate said: 'Young families here are so different in their attitudes to the upbringing of their children. How do you expect their children to see God as a Father when the parents have different ideas of male authority?'

Among all the respondents there was an awareness of how outside factors have corroded the traditional image, so that it is possible for 'God' to be an object of perception without the involvement of real belief. This awareness was brought out in numerous ways by such expressions as "This is the way you were brought up to believe", or "believing in God the way we were taught in school is part of our culture." Even those in the age category of 60 and over were aware that there is a discrepancy between traditional language and the concepts embedded in it. A very old person said: 'I take the Church's teaching on this point; I am too old to move with the times and get rid of what has been drummed into me.' Throughout frequent references were made to past upbringing and education with an implicit recognition that socialised images of God were out of tune with contemporary experience.

Respondents, at first, identified God the Father with the Father of Jesus Christ. A typical response in this category was: 'I have no picture of God, but it is the Lord's prayer that brings my mind what God as a Father means to me.' A similar response was: 'God talk means nothing to me; it is too formless; you need to personalise whatever is behind the word. Christ did this for us.' As will become apparent further on, an antimony was felt between God as Father and the God of Jesus Christ. The belief in an all powerful potentate, creator and ruler, seemed to be at odds in their mind with the doctrine of Christ as the God incarnate.

Comparing the final answers, concepts on the fatherhood of God fell into two more or less overlapping clusters.

The first cluster of replies, that is 64% of the respondents affirmed the meaningfulness of the traditional belief in some way or other, while the second cluster, 36%, expressed doubt, were 'not sure', or were not prepared to elaborate their views any further. Most in the latter category oscillated between seeing God as a personal force or as an impersonal force without further specification.

None of the respondents in either categories expressed doubt about the existence of God as such. What emerged on this question was an implicit concern with the kind of reality to be attributed to the concept of God, and not so much with the question of the separate existence of God. One respondent put it this way: 'Talk about whether God exists or not is old hat now. It is impossible to get an answer.'

Also while the majority were quite conscious of the ineptitude of traditional language and the effects it still has on verbal behaviour, they felt that the new approach in the Church to rejuvenate liturgical language falls short of new social experiences. This point will occupy us in the relevant chapter. It suffices to say here that a tension was experienced

between customary and new ways of talking about God in preaching and services. As one respondent observed: 'How should Catholics, today, the inheritors of so much religious tradition, experience God anew when we are still stuck with a worn out jargon?'

64% who affirmed the usefulness of the Father image were, upon the whole, in favour of retaining some part of it.

For them the belief is far from being satisfactory, but there is little support for having substitutions. The word 'Father' is too old to get rid of in a hurry. 'You see', one person said, 'We all are tired of the father figure, but I do not see how you can talk about God at all if you scrap the word. Afterall there will be always fathers in families.' The concept for them implies a personal dimension one can relate to in actual experience, something stripped of its traditional aura of fear and filial submissiveness. One respondent expressed this idea as follows: 'I do not care whether God is a Father and has built round this belief all sorts of ways of behaving towards him; what matters to me is that we ought to see him like that and get on with it as best as we can in the light of our experience.' They stressed the need to separate the God of love from the God of fear, of hell and damnation. They referred to what they called 'bad teaching in the schools' which in the past extolled the virtue of obedience and excessive respect to parental authority as a model for religious attitudes to God, and the other way round. Most respondents in this category found it difficult to express what they meant by seeing God as something personal. On the one hand, few meant by this expression 'personality' as given, fixed, and simply known. On the other, the only way they could think of God as a person is with some sort of reference to persons as we known them. Expressions were vague. The personal dimension of God was seen by them not as something 'out there' in some visible shape, but as underpinning human relationships. Here follows a telling statement by a girl which sums up well this idea.

'If I think of God or pray to Him I think of Him as a potentiality. God is this potentiality, present but not actualised, for He is waiting to be drawn into people. He becomes actuality in personal commitment, that is, when people realise that they cannot live together as individuals. It is then that they in commiting themselves to each other experience an all embracing care which is more than each individual can give and return.'

36% who were 'not sure' veered between variations of the dychotomy personal/impersonal. Rejecting the traditional image of the fatherhood of God, they were of the opinion that personalising God leads to idolatry in the sense that we put God in the straight jacket of modern ideas of personality. Their main target of criticism was that the concept of God had been too long associated with the cult of masculine superiority and dominance. One respondent said:

'The idea that God is our Father in Heaven has served the Church very well for a long time as long as she was part of society.' A similar response was : 'It just won't do in our day and age to have a dominant male image of God.' The overall impression obtained from their views was that they were very reluctant to retain a picture of God as a supermale. 'Why not call God', one person exclaimed,'mother as well?' It was felt that though we are stuck with the cult of the male it was unlikely that other substitutes would be acceptable to people. Yet doubts were expressed about seeing God as a 'life-force', 'an all pervading spiritual presence in man and the cosmos' etc., As one respondent said: 'once you get away from the old theology of transcendence, you are bound to fall back on the doctrine of God's immanence.' Respondents in this category said that there was little to choose from these alternatives. God in their view cannot be compared to anything in human experience; He must remain elusive. For most the concept of God represents both a personal and impersonal element, defying descriptions. One apt response is given here to illustrate this point: 'God is for me like and unlike the force of gravity.

You cannot visualise, smell or taste it; yet you experience its effect by keeping everything in its place. You cannot ignore its effect.'

12 persons in the same group objected to the traditional doctrine of identifying God with everything good, and of identifying the devil with everything bad. This point will be further explored in the study.

Though no direct question was asked about God the Father as the 'first' in the Trinity of Divine Persons, 8 persons in both groups volunteered views on it. 6 respondents rejected the doctrine. As one respondent put it 'God is not to be counted in three. If God is a spirit, why invent the Holy Spirit to emphasise this?' Little was said except en passant about the Holy Spirit. Some of the respondents were aware of the Pentecostal or charismatic movement in England and elsewhere, but only two persons said that they took some part in it. It was remarked by some that since the Holy Spirit has not been given a name people are less bothered about it. Though the Creed has "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life", Catholic consciousness in so far as the group is concerned is still in the grip of tradition where the Father and Son bond seems to have a greater doctrinal importance.

It is interesting to note that Glock and Stark structured their research on beliefs in a personal God round the Father-son relationship without much reference to the Holy Spirit.

Of interest from a sociological point of view were the deeper and often articulate attitudes to the conception of God conceived as a 'He' or 'Him'. Reactions to the male image came from 6 married couples, including husbands and wives. 4 couples went out of their way to show the difficulties they have in making sense of the belief. One female respondent said: 'You see the identification of father and husband has suffered so many changes. Women want equality in roles and duties in the management of the family. It is hard to see how the experience of young families today can be

related meaningfully to the cliche of God's fatherhood.' Thus their replies showed how the role distribution in modern nuclear families has an effect on perceptions of God.

The main trend in all the replies with different degrees of emphasis indicated a rejection of a substantial part in the traditional belief in the fatherhood of God. This rejection appeared in many variations which cannot be taken up further. But the rejection was clear enough: God as a 'supernatural being', 'up there', endowed with allwatchfulness, with 'eternal hell fire' as a threat for sinners has certainly no place in their minds. In particular, the association of God with fear and punishment came under severe criticism. In contrast, considerable importance was attached to God being the supreme expression of love and reconciliation among men. Frequent references were made to the civil strife in Northern Ireland as an example of what some called 'a mockery of the belief in God'. Here we have an illustration of the feedback between the mythological world and social discourse.

What the discussion, in sum, so far indicates is that there is a significant shift on the part of the group as a whole from an unquestioned traditional conception of God as a powerful Father to various uncertain and diffused images of God. This shift is congruent with the fluid social situation described in chapter 3. In a society where the hierarchy of power is differentiated with a continual emphasis on the rights of the individual it is not surprising that an all powerful and overarching image of God does not correspond to social experience.

Beliefs about the Divinity of Christ

God and Christ are so inextricably interwoven in Christian belief that we only have a very inadequate understanding of how the word 'God' operates in modern religious consciousness unless we attempt to grasp what Jesus Christ means to the group. The doctrine of Jesus Christ being the Son of God is underpinning the whole of the Christian faith. Is it possible that

the Father-conception we have discussed so far is dissociated from that of Christ? If so, is this part of a historical process in Christianity and Catholicism itself? Leszek Kolakowski makes an interesting observation: "any attempt to invalidate Jesus .. on the basis that we don't believe in the God in which he believed, is ridiculous and fruitless.."[1]

However, the possible choices for conceptualising the person and life of Jesus Christ for modern Christians have been considerably widened in our industrialised culture, and these choices have a far reaching range in our linguistic vocabulary. One young male respondent referred to Christ as 'Superstar', a title which would have horrified Christian sensibilities not so long ago. Or consider the description of a science fiction reader among the respondents:

> 'There was a civilisation long before Christ came into the world. He may well have been its emissary or herald who came from this world. U.F.O.'s? Who knows?'

Or another male respondent:

> 'Christ was born in the wrong time; he should have been born now. Only in this day and age would he make sense to us.'

The range of possibilities in structuring meanings with respect to Christ is indeed very large. On one side of the range we have the possibility of denying that Christ ever lived. None of the respondents voiced this possibility though a few said that the stories of what Christ did and said have lost credibility. One respondent said: 'It is a historical hand-me-down dreamed up. How do we know who originated these stories and why?' At the other side of the range we have the traditional view that Jesus Christ is the only true and ultimate incarnation of God, the full expression of the Transcendent.

---

1. L. Kolakowski, Marxism and Beyond, Paladin, 1971, p. 27.

The majority of respondents did indeed take this stance. 75% said that they took Christ's Divinity literally 'as it stands' and 25% were unsure how to make sense of this doctrine. There were no clear boundaries between the two sets of answers, since the conception of divinity is already deeply corroded. The main group indicated that belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God was so deeply embedded in them that any tinkering with it 'would impair the whole of Christianity'. A few persons illustrated this point by saying that if this belief goes nothing much is left of institutional religion. There was an explicit recognition, however, that the simple dichotomy natural/supernatural applied to the divinity of Christ could not be maintained, and that even the formula 'God-made-man'was in some way confusing. A comment here was: 'Christ as the Son of God means for me a manifestation of God, that is, a way in which God becomes comprehensible.' Pressed further, the same person said that 'it may be that God wants to be understood in the way Christ lives.'

References was made earlier to the distinction between God as Father and the Father of Jesus Christ. In both groups a third of the respondents tried to clarify this distinction. According to them the belief in Christ's Divinity is much more important than the belief in God as Father. This came out in some striking examples. It is worth quoting here one or two replies. One respondent said: 'I do not worry very much about God as a being distinct from Christ; I prefer to think of Christ as the God of Christianity.' Or consider the following reply: 'I do not see why we should be burdened with readings from the Old Testament during Mass. — It is Christ who is present in the Eucharist, and not the God of the Jews.'

8 persons pointed out that people are no longer interested in stressing the divine dimension of Christ as something hovering about him which is thrown from outside into the mundane and familiar world. The answers were upon the whole couched in traditional forms borrowed from scripture and language of the Church. Though no specific questions were asked about the Virgin birth, 12 persons in both categories referred to it. Some said that

this was a matter of biology and the fuss made about it had trivialised the real meaning of Christ's divinity which was to reveal the unknown to us. Others said that they could go along without believing in virgin births.

Respondents were aware of various efforts to tailor Christ to modern trends. 'Look' one person said: 'all this lark about Christ as a social reformer, I don't buy it. I never read in the scriptures that he went about propagating the welfare state or joined revolutionaries to overthrow bourgeois society.'

25% of the 'not-so-sure' categorie expressed doubt about the doctrine, its formulation and mythical conceptions. For half in this group Christ is a prophet, a divine 'scout', a man exemplifying a supreme sense of values, a concrete 'expression of the Spirit of God', 'a social force permeating the world'. In this group Jesus Christ has chiefly a human meaning, 'not so different from anyone else', yet 'unclassifiable'.

In both categories of respondents there emerged the feeling that Christ, whatever title has been claimed in his name, and, whatever definition is given to him, is what Christianity should be about. It is difficult to describe here what is meant by 'should' be about. But the main features of these replies place emphasis on the 'form of life', the 'example of humanity' the 'crystallisation of what man should become and is not'. The picture of Christ as Son of God was approached from various angles but for the respondents on the whole God-talk has no sense except in relation to the person of Christ. Here efforts to clarify ideas and beliefs about Christ moved away from a supernatural Christ towards a natural one, a process of horizontalisation.

The efficacy of his person is visualised to the extent that it can be experienced as operative in concerns surrounding the daily lives of the respondents. Most respondents thus understood Christ as an exemplar of personal life. One could say that Weber's 'exemplary prophet' would be a corresponding ideal type to describe what they meant. Others applauded what they called 'Christ's re-entry into the world'. The divinity of Christ appears to be de-emphasised. It is his humanity that is thought of as

characterising him as the Son of God. The ethical appeal, emanating from Christ's life as seen by many respondents appears in their minds to be dislodged from an ontological conception of God. This does not mean that those respondents have in any way rejected the divinity of Christ.

Other meanings were explored by asking respondents 'What does the death of Jesus Christ mean to you?' Part of the Christian cosmology is the myth of the dying God come to life again. For Catholics the death of Christ is not only remembered on Good Friday, but constitutes the core of the 'Sacrifice of the Mass'. In the old Latin liturgy, the sacrificial aspect of Christ's death was pictorially emphasised. In most church buildings, for instance, a wooden cross with the figure of a dying man used to hang high above the altar to remind the faithful of Christ's sacrificial death. In the old Catholic parish churches in Formby one can still see crosses of this type, whereas in the parish Hall of St. Jerome (which serves as a temporary church building) the familiar symbol as large as life is no longer there.

It is relevant to mention here that the ritual of abstaining from meat on every Friday is memory of the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross has been officially abolished in the Catholic world by the Decree on Fasting and Abstinence (Paenitemene) in 1966. This , of course, does not mean that Catholics have ceased to use the ritual or choose their own way of self denial each Friday.

Let us now explore what the death of Christ means to the respondents. What transformations can we detect in their attitudes to this article of faith? When in the pre-vatican II liturgy, the priest celebrating had his back to the people, he and the congregation faced the divine mystery of death by situating their gaze, so to say, on the cross above the altar It was a symbolic gesture of reaching out to the death of Christ as a solitary focus removed from the midst of the people. In the new liturgy the priest faces the congregation,

and looks over the cross (usually a small one) placed before him on the altar and symbolically places, so to say, the sacrificial act in the centre of the worshipping community. Here the pictorial shift is marked: the dying Christ is no longer seen as 'on high', to be looked at from 'below' the congregation but is transferred to the centre of the worshipping faithful so as to make the community the bearer and sharer of the sacrificial act.

In their views on the death of Christ, all the respondents, at first, accepted the doctrine in traditional terms. Immediate reactions were: ' He died to take away our sins', or : ' He shed his blood to wash away our sins'. But on further questio - ning, respondents fell into two overlapping categories which were difficult to give sharp boundaries. 46% expressed puzzlement about the purpose of his death, while 54% found it difficult to see a connection between Christ's sacrifice and men's redemption from personal and collective sin.

Those in the 46% category tended to move away from seeing his death as something given " once and for all". Comments on this line were, for example, ' I do not know. What did He die for ? May be for his own beliefs'. Or: ' How can one die to save people who died before him and have died after him ?' Or : ' Hard to say. It all ended on the cross; it puzzles me, why go through all this trouble if Jesus is the Son of God ?'.

Those who did not see a connection between sacrifice and re - demption from sin (54%) accepted Christ's death as a potent sym- bol of the Christian faith, but felt unsure about God being in need of a sacrifice. Respondents in this category thought that the image of an angry God to be placated was somehow out- dated theology. But what they found as something valuable is the unselfishness and generosity of his death. Nearly two -third of the respondents in this category alluded to it. A comment was : " We are beastly selfish; everybody out for himself in the rat race. Christ's example is something to hang on to what life should be like'. Or : ' His death means a total giving away of oneself, like a woman in love.'

The inevitable question was raised as to the metaphysical relationship of this norm to practical life, and the Church. The ideal of unselfishness being emphasised as the highest expression of Christ on the cross was also seen by these people as an inadequate account of what the whole event of crucified Christ might mean.

The second meaning attached to the death of Christ was that of being an examplar of how one should face death and suffering. One respondent put it this way:'Thousands die more horrible deaths than Christ did. His death is that of a lost cause, of despair. Death today is cheapened. There are too many of us anyway, and almost the death of individual beings has lost all significance in the big heap of humanity.' or:'Christ died alone. Perhaps this more than anything else in the comforting fact for those who believe in him. A man of hopelessness. There must be a point to it all, nobody knows, but it is such a tangible truth to live by'. The sacredness of death, its significance in the scheme of salvation, then, seemed to have been corroded. There is little connection in the minds over half the respondents of the death of Christ with redemption from sin.

Apparently, the association of sin with death is receding from the consciousness of modern Catholics. More will be said about the connection of sin with other moral and ritual dimensions in the relevant chapters.

Sufficé to say here that in Formby as everywhere else in the western world the immediate physical presence of death is removed from social experience. Babies are born in maternity wards, the old and sick die in hospitals and in homes for old people.

Bryan Wilson remarks on this : ' From being a socially recognised inevitability, death has become an embarrassing private trauma in which almost any outside solace except from intimates, has become an intrusion.'

---

1. Bryan Wilson, Religion in Secular Society , p. 93. An account of changing conceptions of death in Western Society is provi - ded by Philippe Ariès, Western Attitudes toward Death, from the Middle Ages to the Present, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore,1974.

Catholic priests used to perform Extreme Unction (last anointing) at the request of the families concerned in their homes. On such an occasion the whole family came together to witness and participate in the ritual which cleansed the dying from stains of sin. The symbol of social solidarity and fellowship was then reinforced, and the participating members of the family were reminded of the spiritual bond of belonging and constituting the Church on earth and in Heaven. Today the priest increasingly performs this rite in hospitals away from the family context.

A third of the respondents werenot even aware of the renewed form of Extreme Unction which is now called the 'Sacrament of the Sick'. [2]

The new text does not mention death, but rather speaks of deliverance from sickness and restoration of bodily health.

The new rite requires still 'danger of death' though the danger need not be proximate. Priests are reminded that they in public teaching and privately should encourage people to ask for anointing on <u>their own initiative.</u> The anointing is not to be viewed as a magical remedy. Here in the new rite, emphasis is placed on the initiative of those concerned; appeal is made to individual responsibility, and the sick person should be able to take part in the celebration consciously and actively as far as possible.

Catholic practice has been to anoint the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, hands and feet. This has now been simplified and the Sacrament will be expressed by anointing the sick person on the forehead and hands alone. Once more, we can see the movement away from death as a communal symbol in which the sacred was represented socially, towards an individualised conception of death. We shall have occasion to study in more detail when dealing with the ritual dimension the emptying out process with respect to the opposite symbol, that of Baptism. It suffices to say here that the individual's attitude to this sacrament is

---

2 <u>Documents of Vatican II</u>; the constitution for the Sacred Liturgy called for its revision in articles 73-75. The work of revision was completed and revised by Pope Paul, 13 Nov., 1972. The full text is to be found in <u>The Furrow</u>, Vol. 24, No. 3, March 1973, pp. 184-187.

is reflected in the following comment:

'Extreme unction used to be an insurance - policy, making sure that you got over the last ditch. Now we have insurance policies for covering accidents and death on the road.'

It can be seen from the respondents' understanding of death that a shift of meaning has taken place which removes the emphasis of the connection of Christ's death with personal sin and salvation.

Beliefs on the Resurrection of Christ

In their views on the Resurrection, the respondents form three groups: those who accept it as a belief with some qualification (35%); those who give it a symbolic interpretation (52%): those for whom the doctrine means very little (13%).

Comments in the first group were: 'For me he did rise, and that is the end of it; it is a mystery and must remain so.' Or: 'Christ's rising from the dead is another way of visualising the creative power of the unseen God.' There was little talk about Christ going to a place, or ascending into Heaven "to sit at the right hand of the Father". The literal meaning adopted here was not a pictorial one interlaced with references to the Scriptures. Hardly anybody mentioned the empty tomb or referred to any other incident involved in the story of the resurrection. One person said: 'I accept the belief, but I only think about it during the Holy week" somehow the story is part of your mental furniture'.

This group accepted the Resurrection as part of the mystery of faith and showed little concern whether or not it is a historical fact. One respondent illustrated this point very well by stressing his indifference to the historical aspect of the belief: 'I do not really need the gospel story to confirm my belief in Jesus' resurrection from the dead. I would say that the logic of Christianity demands that God in becoming man must die and rise. Once you postulate a death for God, you must accept his rising from the dead, the one implies the other.' The physical dimension of the resurrection appeared to have

more meaning for them than the death of Christ. Moreover, not only those in this group but also those in the remaining groups did not see the resurrection as a salvation event.

Those who favoured a symbolic interpretation ignored the physical part of it altogether. For them the resurrection is a symbol of man's hopes, his strivings for a better life, and mankind's perennial drive for renewal. Many persons in this group groped for metaphors to express what they were trying to mean. For example, one respondent said: 'I think of spring as an apt illustration for what the doctrine means to me: nature renews itself in spring. Who would have thought that the dead trees in winter would ever come to life again?' The bodily resurrection had little appeal to them. A final illustration suffices: 'Christ is not seen in the body, but experienced in spirit. What is the use of stressing Christ in the body, when we have to get on with what He means to us today?'

Those who did not know what to make of the belief were generally inclined to reject the story of the resurrection as 'mythical'. For them this belief is beautiful story without much personal meaning. It is enough to quote one respondent in full to illustrate the general drift of meaning in this group.

> 'The resurrection story is very old in the evolution of man. It helped people in the past to make sense of what they could not understand. They were ignorant of the basic laws of nature. To imagine that things and people are reborn seemed a plausible way for explaining how life is for ever perpetuating itself.'

From these accounts it can be seen that this fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith departs in many ways from traditional interpretations of what the belief should mean.

Beliefs in the after-Life.

Christ's resurrection from the dead is an essential part of Christian faith and cosmology. So is mankind's eventual resurrection and participation in Christ's Kingdom. An important point to note is that while the belief in the resurrection of man can be interpreted in terms of collective survival, for most Christians the belief is associated with individual survival. In their comments all the respondents took for granted that the resurrection of the body is an individual affair. How do they understand this belief?

They fell into two groups: those who interpreted the doctrine symbolically (82%) , and those for whom it has no meaning at all (18%). Both groups agreed that whatever it means it cannot be taken in a literal sense.

82% of the respondents while accepting the doctrine as an article of faith, as part and parcel of 'culture' and the 'way you were brought up' were mainly puzzled about the status of the resurrected body. A typical answer was: 'I believe in the after-life in some form or other, but why insist on the bodily resurrection? I do not see any point in it. As we have been told, we will be like angels without marrying or being given into marriage. If we will be like angels, we won't have a human body.' Another respondent gave a similar answer: 'The union of the faithful in God in some separate world, with the choir of saints and angels in their company; no, this childhood picture has gone clean out of my mind.' The notion of survival was interpreted by them as a spiritual transformation starting here and now and being completed in union with God. This ascent is seen as a spiritual progression so that your resurrection could take place at any point in time during this life. Some respondents used the idea of a cyclical recurrence of life on different planes of transformation, reminiscent of the Hindu doctrine of samsara. It is worth quoting a reply in this context: 'You have to go through a series of planes to the great unknown; each plane represents a form of consciousness more refined

than the previous one, depending of course, on the good use you made of it. The after-life for me is an intermediate plane with nothing final about it.'

Survival for this group means enlargement of consciousness, of an unfolding of the self on the way to actualisation. The dissolution of the body in death is only a further step in the transformation of the self. One of the philosophically-minded of the respondents put it this way: 'I accept the belief in the after life as a profound picture of what human beings must become in the end. You see, modern man is less and less constrained by the demands of bodily needs. Our age is one of going beyond the body. If you ask me, the after-life is already taking place, and this has nothing to do with believing in a world which is supposed to come after this one.'

For those who rejected the literal truth of the belief and did not try to give a symbolic interpretation of it, the doctrine appeared meaningless. Those in this category were of the opinion that the idea of an after-life is a hang over from mythical thought. For them, as one typical answer account ran: 'It is a way of expressing how thought survives the thinker, the deed the doer. Look at the great products of art. Painters survive in their paintings but the ideas they expressed cannot be said to have existence in a separate world.' For them, the doctrine has no personal meaning, and as several admitted, 'you can be a Catholic and yet be an agnostic without feeling that you have departed from the teaching of the Church.'

What emerged from these account is a blur between this wordly and other wordly conceptions of religion. As noted before, the boundaries between the 'sacred' and 'profane' or between the natural and the supernatural appeared to be ambiguous and in a state of flux.

Beliefs on Heaven and Hell

'Going up' to Heaven and 'Going down' to Hell are polar concepts in Christian cosmology as being part of the 'last things' that await the believer

beyond physical death. Their polarity bears an analogous relation to the Levi-Straussian idea of binary oppositions as characteristic of mythical thought. But this type of opposition is confounded in the traditional Catholic belief system by the interposition of beliefs in the existence of Purgatory and Limbo which function as intermediate categories for those who cannot enter Heaven or Hell. Furthermore, they intervene in these belief set in opposition to each other and have become over time an integral part of Catholics' understanding of Heaven and Hell.

This point is worth stressing because respondents' replies to what these beliefs mean to them are intimately connected with beliefs in Purgatory and Limbo. Using a theological metaphor, the souls in Purgatory are neither wholly in a state of grace nor wholly in a state of mortal sin; they can be compared to anomalous beings without a status and a prescribed role. To change the metaphor, they can be compared to persons like the young male in primitive society who during the time of his initiation is poised between adolescence and adulthood without having the social status and role of either. Yet the souls in Purgatory can during their stay be helped by the prayers of the faithful. The Council of Trent issued a decree on Purgatory affirming its existence as defined by previous Councils, and affirmed that the souls detained there are helped by the faithful on earth.

This decree is still in force, and All Souls' Day (2nd of November) enjoys today an honoured status among Catholics.

In contrast, Limbo is not conceived so much as a place of transition from one threshold to the next, but as a terminal to which the souls of unbaptised children are allocated. These souls through no fault of their own are deprived, as the old theology has it, of the vision of God and are compensated by happiness appropriate to their lot. They cannot, however, be helped by others. Yet they are neither damned nor in a state of grace, While at the heart of the belief in Purgatory lies a picture of space and time like a kind of an interlocked three - storied sacred cosmos, the belief

in Limbo has troubled Catholics over a long time. It does not seem to fit their ideas of reward and punishment to the same extent as the belief in Purgatory does. This digression was necessary as some aspects of these beliefs touch on what follows in the description of respondents' attitudes to Heaven and Hell.

As to the question of what they believe about Heaven, the respondents fell into two more or less overlapping categories. The largest group (80%) interpreted it symbolically, while the remainder (20%) were unsure.

Those in the 80% category regarded Heaven as something vague mixed up with childhood pictures and memories which persist in the corners of one's mind. Heaven was generally described as meaning a spiritual condition', 'a state of mind', 'a form of consciousness', the object of which is a kind of 'self-realisation' in union with God.

A comment was: 'I do not see Heaven as a place to go to; it is simply another way of saying that man is destined to experience a spiritual dimension beyond the physical fact of death. It probably means that one has attained a spiritual maturity in knowing what one's own life has been all about'. All the respondents in this group were anxious to dissociate their idea of Heaven from spatial images. 'Heaven' and 'Hell', one person said, 'are man-made pictures expressing something inexpressible; you cannot put your finger on it.' They did not see Heaven as a place outside time, but as part of the process of spiritual self-awareness.

Less than half expressed puzzlement about the connection of the resurrection from the dead with belief in Heaven. While recognising that Heaven means 'union with God' or with some 'life-force', they saw an ambiguity in this connection, in that the resurrected body is still a human body requiring a place to move in. One elderly person said: 'Christ went to his Father in his glorified body. He was not a ghost if we accept the Gospel's account. Surely this can only mean that we also must experience God as corporal beings in some place.'

Intermingled with some of these views were metaphors based on the analogy of a balance. In trying to illustrate their point of view, a number of respondents used this idea of 'balancing' of 'equilibrium' with Heaven and Hell as opposites, each demanding the other in keeping the 'system of rewards and punishments' together.

Heaven and Hell are symbolising the two arms of the scale. If you are weighing something, one arm goes up, the other goes down. In order to get the acquired amount you keep adding and subtracting from the amount, and it is only when you get the arms in equilibrium that you know that the amount weighed is in proportion to the price to be paid for it. It is worth quoting in full a reply.

> 'Heaven and Hell are very old words reflecting a mythological representation which is no longer ours. They have outgrown their usefulness in giving us a plausible explanation of what lies beyond sense-experiences. But the reality they pictured is there all the same: you get what you deserve according the standards of morality, whatever they may be in a society'.

According to 80% the meanings of 'up' and 'down' are tied up with an outgrown religious vocabulary; they signify, man's ethical nature in its surge for utopias of different kinds fashioned in the image of dominant concerns with man's improvement ofhimself and the world around him.

Those (20%) who saw little personal meaning in the belief in Heaven were unanimous in saying that 'no one really knows'. As one person put it: 'you see, like so many other beliefs in another world your doubts about them are stultified because there are no facts which could serve as a reliable basis for disbelieving, any more than there are facts to support them.' Or: 'We were always taught that there is a Father in Heaven. This led you to believe that He must be somewhere with His angels and Saints. As I see it, this Heaven can be anywhere; nothing more can be said about it.'

Respondents in both groups were well aware of the moral aspect of these beliefs as they had experienced their effects on them in the past. More of this will become apparent in relevant discussions on the affective side of cognitive beliefs. A relevant answer was: 'The teachings on Heaven and Hell such as we were used to hear at shcool and in sermons were of great help to keep you in your place and stifled any attempt to question them. It made sense as long as it lasted. It is as simple as that; you cannot make people to follow the good and avoid the evil unless you use threat and reward. This is how any society keeps going, no matter how enlightened people think they are.'

Replies to the question as to what respondents think of Hell produced more or less the same pattern. The overwhelming majority (90%) did not believe in the existence of Hell. The remaining group felt unsure about it but shared with the main group a strong aversion to the traditional images of hell fire, eternal damnation, and of Hell being the kingdom of Satan and the fallen angels. The God of fire and brimstone did not shine brightly in these reactions. As in the case of their views on Heaven, the replies showed a move away from pictorial representations. As one person expressed it: 'Fire is a natural sign of a purification process by which elements are sorted out. It reminds me of my chemistry lessons at school when each of us was provided in the laboratory with a gas burner.' Physical pain and suffering were rejected as inappropriate images for describing what Hell stands for.

Just as Heaven was understood as 'a state of mind', 'self-realisation in and through God', so its opposite was more or less interpreted in similar terms. A clear answer was: 'Heaven means for me the fullest realisation of the human personality and of identify; but Hell is a cypher for amorphous existence, lack of love, absence of God.' Similar quotes could be given to illustrate the underlying meaning.

As could be expected, strong disavowals were voiced on the topic of eternal punishment for sins people have committed during their life time. Nobody believed that a person could be punished eternally for misdeeds he has committed in his temporal life. Similarly, the doctrine of eternal damnation without any reprieve seemed for many to have little meaning. Five respondents pointed out that there is a contradiction in Christianity by stressing, on the one hand, God's all encompassing love for men, and, on the other, by relating the sinner to a point of no return. Referring to this contradiction, one person said: 'I cannot swallow it. If God is love, why invent Hell?' Although respondents were not directly asked to say something about Purgatory and Limbo, they made allusions to these categories when they discussed some of the aspects of eternal punishment. Just as the here-after was spoken of as a concept with little meaning if it is grounded in a rectilinear notion of time, so the concept of Purgatory was seen in similar terms though with a difference. Here too respondents rejected the image of fire, but many found the underlying idea of purgation restricted to a limited time comforting and symbolising the human condition.

A description was: 'Purgatory gives you a second chance; you can make up for what you have done wrong. 'Or: 'We are neither Saints nor die-hard sinners in this life, but something in between. Purgatory sums up for me this sort of condition'. Moreover, the belief that souls in purgatory are helped by others to get out of their plight was regarded by several persons as an indication of the spiritual dimension of man.' It brings home to you' one person said, 'that even after death we need each other in becoming whatever we are meant to be.'

As to Limbo, rejections were outright and explicit. Only a few were willing to discuss it, but those who did so were of the opinion that Limbo could not be squared with God's love for men. An answer in this respect was: 'It is an absurd belief. How can God deprive unbaptised children of his vision when they have not committed any personal sin?' Yet the fear that something may happen to the baby if Baptism is delayed was still found to be

operative in some answers. A young woman said: 'I do not believe in Limbo at all but I would like to have my baby baptised as soon as possible in case....'

Some further beliefs on Heaven and Hell

Although the Creed does not propose the existence of the devil as an article of faith, his existence is presupposed in sacramental worship. The majority (80%) did not believe in the devil as a personal being, while the rest were unsure. According to 80% the whole complex of ideas and practices surrounding belief in the devil is another example of man's need to personify forces he cannot understand. A comment was: 'I do not accept the existence of the devil in a literal sense as some supernatural agent, the prince of darkness and the sole ruler of Hell.' The tendency among the respondents in this group was to regard the devil as an impersonal force. The analogy of opposites appeared again in some of the replies. For example, a person said: 'If God is taken to mean the principle of light and goodness, it follows that there must be something opposing him to make sense of this. You cannot conceive of light unless you have a notion of darkness.'

Those who were unsure made similar comments but qualified their scepticism. A comment was: 'I do not believe in devils and angels and all the clap trap, but evil exists in people, objects and events. To say that these beliefs are nonsense is going a bit too far. There is something subjective and objective about the whole business of evil but we have no understanding of how evil originates in people or how they are influenced by it.'

With regard to Heaven as being co-extensive with the Kingdom of God, there was little to show that respondents saw the Kingdom as a final stage. The confusion about the boundaries of the natural and supernatural produced ambiguous answers. For most God's kingdom is something to be realised here and now without reference to traditional beliefs as to the final shape of God in His glory surrounded by His saints and the elect.

In conclusion, what the findings suggest is that cognitive beliefs cannot be separated from other types of belief but interact with them. If we were to apply a structuralist perspective in which the human subject is eliminated, then there is a point in saying that beliefs transform themselves by interacting with each other irrespective of the individual who takes part in them. The evidence limited as it is show that credal beliefs have links with secular beliefs and that they contribute to each other. Some of these links became manifest through their symbolic expressions in the language of the group and in the ways in which they tried to cope with their meaning, but it proved difficult to connect these links with the social at precise points. What became clear, however, was that the group was aware of these structural changes.

Returning to the theme of secularisation, can it be said that these beliefs are secularised? It is enough to say here that institutional beliefs have lost their social significance for the group, in that they have reached a level of consciousness in their minds so that their status is modified. Once this level is reached, such beliefs are likely to lose their hold. However, even though individual beliefs did not bear much relationship to official ones, the evidence shows that the group still used the metaphysical framework of the Church in stating their views. In terms of bricolage, they used the pre-given elements of language and metaphysical conceptions to create 'routes' along the cognitive paths.

Chapter V

AUTHORITY STRUCTURE AND MORAL IMAGES

"The ideal society is not outside of the real society; it is part of it"
Durkheim. [1].

The connection of 'beliefs' and 'values'

In the previous chapter we have considered the reactions of the members of the reference-group to doctrinal beliefs. While reporting their views, an attempt was made to locate some of the psychological and social factors which entered the interpretations of those beliefs.

In this chapter we will turn our attention to the sphere of moral values insofar as the inquiry is made to bear on them in a specific Catholic context and to the extent to which they are shared by the group. Before presenting the findings on moral values as they were perceived and interpreted by the respondents, it is helpful at this point to recapitulate some previous findings on beliefs so as to forge a link between religious 'cognitions' and 'values'.

The distinction and connection between beliefs and values is, of course, an analytic one adopted in social and anthropological research. However, it might be plausibly argued, that in order to construct a coherent picture of what goes on in the Catholic community in the face of social change it would be better to ignore what people actually believe and get on with examining the ways they evaluate these beliefs in the light of their social experience. Values are more easily observable and categorised in behaviour than beliefs are.

---

1. Elementary Forms, p. 42.

But this procedure provides only a partial view of a culture under investigation. The apparent self-evidence of the meaning of certain moral codes may well be misleading in the absence of knowledge of the relevant underlying beliefs. For example, the present changes in sexual morality and the attitudes of Catholics to it cannot easily be abstracted from the Catholic cosmology and studied in isolation from it. And, as one may observe from reading relevant literature on such matters, what often appears at first to be differences in values are in fact differences in beliefs. It is often the case that one way of altering the values of a person or group is to try and change their basic beliefs, or to make them more explicit. This is not to say that disagreements in attitude are always due to disagreements in beliefs.

Surveying the data on beliefs collected and analysed in the previous chapter, several features stood out as to the relationship of beliefs and values in the cognitive process of exchange. First, it was found that, generally speaking, the majority of respondents, while describing their attitude to doctrinal beliefs, tended to select from them those elements which accorded with their life experiences in a predominantly middle class community. Consider, for example, the reactions of a proportion of female respondents to the traditional doctrine of the fatherhood of God. As already mentioned, the metaphors they used in expressing their feeling were not merely indicating the rejection of a traditional image of the Deity but also a transformation of the concept of masculinity and male prerogatives in modern society. The ways in which collective beliefs were interpreted showed that at a deeper level they were rated according to some scale of values.

Secondly, what emerged from the replies was not only the fact that the content of belief was being transformed, but also the prescribed way of believing was being challenged in the process. In the recent past Catholics were held together, at least within the clear boundaries of orthodoxy, by

giving assent to official positions unequivocally regardless of their individual views and attitudes. The foregoing analysis showed that the respondents taken as a whole hold a plurality of beliefs and were quite conscious of various alternative belief systems in a changing society. As was pointed out earlier, modern man belongs to many groups and sub-cultures with the result that no specific belief system can be binding on him in an absolute sense.[2.] In the light of this it becomes doubtful whether a sociological inquiry into a belief-system, apart from the conditions in which these beliefs are held, will enable us to advance our understanding of the interconnection of religious symbols and the milieu in which they are embedded. Dr. Brothers maintains that the rapid expansion of the new Catholic middle class will lead to changes in cultural behaviour. This being generally true, she believes that these new Catholic middle classes in England "will share the same basic beliefs, unaltered by differences in the environment occasioned by place or time, yet will express them differently".[3.] The fact that there were found in the replies many variations in the cognitive field, ranging from strict Catholic orthodoxy to extreme liberalism, did not necessarily imply a total relativization. As became evident when the replies were collated and compared, the variations all had a great deal in common and were by no means a random affair. They were all grounded in the Roman Catholic belief system .

Cognitive choices did not appear to be free from historical and social determinants which frequently coloured respondents' views and attitudes. In justifying, for example, their stances vis-a-vis the doctrines of the Church, they invariably appealed to their consciousness of what things were like in the olden days. The phrase "This was the way you were brought up to

---

2. Peter L. Berger speaks in this context of the 'pluralization of social life-worlds' as symptomatic of industrial society and discusses it in relation to religion. See, The Sacred Canopy, Garden City, N.Y. Doubleday,1967.
3. J. Brothers, op.cit., p. 13. (emphasis mine)

believe" was very frequently used across the age and sex categories, especially of those over 30. The collective memory as to how beliefs were taught and internalised through the agencies of parish, school and family played a significant part in the structuring of the answers. This fact by itself illustrates that there cannot be a complete break between each generation and the next in the transmission of beliefs, values and their symbolic vehicles. Although the bulk of the newcomers to the housing estate might be described as third-generation Merseyside Catholics who felt that they are assimilated into the wider society, yet traces of the past were clearly evident even in those who asserted a certain amount of marginality to the "Faith of their fathers". It is a common tenet in the sociology of knowledge that individuals receive most of their beliefs through socialisation but are also actively involved in the choice, modification, or even rejection of these beliefs. But this selective creativity such as we have attempted to describe can result in substantial changes in the beliefs of a culture as a whole without the actors being aware of their contribution to these changes. Striking in this respect was the observed trend among respondents to treat the cognitive aspect of beliefs as of secondary importance and emphasise their moral content and significance. The dividing lines were clearly vague in the interpretations offered. To express it in simple terms, the question of what to believe and how to believe was not found, at the cognitive level, but rather at the moral level. The group, - again as a whole - was not interested in to what extent beliefs were to be regarded as prior classifications for the structuring of religious experience, but rather in what sense they serve as guide-lines for moral behaviour. The theory that religion and morals, which, as Durkheim insists, emerge together - was not invalidated by this shift, but the cognitive religious content was diffused and amorphous. The church has stressed over a long period the ontological connection of 'faith' and 'morals' as complementary constituents of its cosmology. For example, until very recently the moral duty of attending Mass was naturally connected with belief in transubstantiation, the one implying the other. Thomist philosophy of natural law claimed

that values had the same epistemological status as facts. The metaphysics in question attempted to bind values and facts within a unifying system in which the natural and ethical order came to be fused into a seamless garment. This, as J. Ellul has argued, was the very core of Christendom.[4] As a result, the very concepts of 'value' and 'fact', between which we now divide the social world, were always alien to Catholicism. Although it is no longer possible to speak of a unifying set of moral beliefs and practices as being characteristic of Christianity in the West as a whole since we live with rival moralities without an acceptable court of appeal, the Catholic Church was probably the last one among the Christian churches which kept providing its adherents with a protective shield for the passage from beliefs to moral values. That this shield has now been shattered even within the Roman Catholic Church is certain. Given this situation, it was but to be expected that Catholics in general are perhaps more vulnerable than their fellow Christians in their confrontation with competing moralities. Those reared in the Protestant tradition have in any case long been accustomed to live in a world of moral choice and responsibility. The disenchantment with doctrines insofar as these respondents were concerned could be partly attributed to their having become aware of the disjunction of faith and morals. Doctrines have become floating signs and were reported as being no longer experienced as affecting believing behaviour. This general finding demonstrates an important point about their function on the plane of signification. That is, once their functions are known or have begun to be known to their users, they are likely, insofar as they are signs, to lose a great deal of their efficacy. Consider, for example, some of the interpretations of the belief in Limbo, the place were unbaptised children were believed to go. This belief was dismissed as irrational and unethical. Why should innocent souls of unbaptised children be treated diffently from the souls of baptised ones? Implicit in these and similar interpretations was a realization of seeing certain beliefs as socially and historically determined and less as representations of religious truth.

---

4. J. Ellul, The New Demons, Mowbrays, London, 1973, Chapter 1.

Thus the criteria of relevancy for the validity of many of these beliefs came from outside the religious tradition itself. Within the framework of this study we could say that the modern bricoleur in the field of religion is different from his counterpart in pre-industrial and small-scale societies - whose religion was identified at every point with his culture. The issue is infinitely more complex in modern society since man must combine signs and symbols with values arising out of disparate provenances of meaning and experiences, as M. Yinger has observed.[5]

Some value-parameters

Before presenting the group's response to questions on various aspects of the moral dimension both at an institutional and group level, it is necessary to indicate some of the parameters of this dimension. These parameters are directly related to the authority structure of the church in the context of socio-cultural change. Tensions in the authority structure of the church have come more to the surface after Vatican Council II spoke of the Church as the people of God "or "the priesthood of the people of God". Clearly, the Council undertook to project a new image of the Church with the purpose of allowing lay people to take a more active part in its organisational life. The conciliar documents[1] see the Church first and foremost as the spiritual fellowship of her baptised members, and only secondarily as a hierarchical community. In doing so it attempts to stress the family character of the Church and overcome the traditional dichotomy of clergy and laity. Thus an advance was made by informing the people of God that they have to consider themselves as equal to the clergy. As a result, after this documents was published, new parish councils were founded everywhere. Authority and decision making, once the exclusive prerogative of the clergy

---

J. Milton Yinger, Sociology looks at Religion, The Macmillan Company, London, 1969, pp. 154-155. "In the field of morals there has been a great lag in developing a code of behaviour that is appropriate to the urban, mobile, secondary world in which so many of us live. To a significant degree we literally do not know how to behave..."

See Documents of Vatican II, On the Church , chapter II.

Although in the period following the Vatican Council a reduction of the traditional docility and deference to clerical leadership by Roman Catholics in England and elsewhere was manifest, it cannot be said that substantial changes in the structure of authority have been made since then in order to translate the promise into reality. Reports from different countries show that the structures of authority in the church have remained substantially unchanged.[2] On the one hand, the bishops have put themselves in the position of legislating open-ended change and of retaining control over details of change. On the other, when the laity is likely to move too close to akward issues, the bishops say that their authority is being watered down. The notion of a questioning Church did not survive for very long since organisations have to get on with the business of government and cannot allow its fundamental structures to be questioned at every point and continually. Does the concept of the Church as "the people of God" really mean shared authority from the Pope down to the ordinary Catholic? Not surprisingly, polarisations occurred between those who favoured the comfortable certainties of the traditional authority structures and corresponding ideologies, and those who felt that their religious belief and commitment needed to be expressed in new ways in consonance with the changing conditions of time. Tensions, also, became apparent in the late 60s and earlier part of the 70s in the approach of Catholics to the ecumenical movement, in their reception of changes in the litury and, especially, of the reiteration of the official standpoint on the birth control issue and related questions.

---

2. This inner contradiction has been highlighted by Douglas Roche in the U.S.A. in his book The Catholic Revolution, New York, David McKay Company, Inc., 1968. In England Dr. N. Kokosalakis has documented some of these conflicts and tensions in the Roman Catholic community, Aspects of Conflict between the Structure of Authority and the Beliefs of the Laity in the Roman Catholic Church, ch. 2, in M.Hill (ed.,) A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain, 4, SCM Press, 1971, pp.21-35. For an analysis of the conflicts which arise out of the failure of the Church to develop her hierarchic structure to meet the situations created by social change in England, see A.E.C.W. Spencer, The structure and organization of the Catholic Church in England in Uses of Sociology (eds.), J.D. Halloran & J. Brothers, 1966, Sheed and Ward, pp.91-125. In Holland W. Goddijn has explored his problem in The Deferred Revolution, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 1975.

It is to be expected that an institution which, like the Church, has for centuries exercised a tight social control over its members is likely to run into serious trouble when it tries to change to consultative and participative styles of leadership. However, the polarizations mentioned can be better understood if we recall what was said earlier on the traditional relationship of faith and morals. Beliefs and values were not seen it was argued, as two separate dimensions but as the two sides of the same coin or - to use another analogy - as the two faces of a sheet of paper. Pope Paul in his encyclical Humanae Vitae, for example, connects natural law conceived in an Aristotelian-Thomist category with moral prescription in his ruling on artificial birth control. He defends in it the Catholic position of long standing. This point needs developing a bit further to throw light on the nature of the moral crisis in the Church. An aspect of this crisis can be put down to the fact that for modern Catholics the taken-for-granted relation of principles and rules in the regulation of conduct is no longer plausible. Historical Christianity inherited from Judaism an authoritarian concept of morality in which rules have been conceived as commands and prohibitions. The obligatory character of the rules obtained their binding force from a moral God who is the locus of command and prohibition, the one who condemns, shelters, consoles, rewards and punishes. Although authority must be distinguished from authoritarianism, the moral commands emanating from God through the Church were in the course of time regarded as fixed structures rather than as ethical injunctions allowing elbow room for individual creativity and choice. The Ten Commandments and the precepts of the Church were simply out there, having a validity and binding power independent of any value of their own. You were, so to say, provided with principles and rules at the same time regardless of the situation in which they were to be used. This is what Thomas O'Dea has called an historical ontologism[3]. which the reforming Church is anxious to break away from.

---

3. Thomas F. O'Dea, The Catholic Crisis, 1968, Boston & Bacon Press, p. 114.

Part of the growing discontent with traditional morality among ordinary Catholics is perhaps due to their realisation that moral principles are not the same as rules and commands. From an anthropological point of view, the Catholic authoritarian presuppositions with regard to moral codes bear a striking analogy to Durkheim's position in his sociology of morality.[4] For him, morality consists of rules of conduct perceived as obligatory and desirable. The obligatoriness of the rules derive from the moral authority behind them and violation of them entailed a sanction (blame, punishment). Because Durkheim rejected God as the source of morality, he found as a substitute society itself and endowed it with the aura of sacredndess which he conjoined with obligation and desirability. The analogy holds good in another point. Just as Durkheim could not find a place for the individual within this scheme though he was aware of the rise of the cult of the individual, so the Catholic value system could not allow, as Protestants did, for individual moral choice and responsibility. Durkheim is clearly right in insisting that the study of morals must begin with the beliefs that people actually have and with the conditions under which these beliefs are generated, sustained and maintained. But because of the elimination of the subject in his sociology, he failed to see that the principles of conduct are not only to be taken as given by society, but also to be interpreted by individual consciousness.

Though it is true to say that the Church regulated and organised pattern of moral behaviour of its members in the period prior to Vatican II in a Durkheimian way, it is equally true to say that there are indications that it is becoming greatly dependent on the members' activities, sentiments, and attitudes. But it is not as yet clear in what exact ways various personal views and attitudes, limited to social groupings, are becoming "exchanged" into norms which derive their force from both inside and outside the Church.

---

4. E. Durkheim, Sociology and Philosophy, 1974, Free Press, Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp. 68-72. For a concise critique of D urkheim's sociology of morality, see Morris Ginsberg, Durkheim's Ethical Theory in Émile Durkheim, Robert A. Nisbet, Prentice-Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, N.Y. 1965, pp. 142-152. A more recent discussion of Durkheim's position can be found in Steven Lukes, Emile Durkheim: His Life and Work, 1973, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, chapter 21, The Sociology of Morality, pp. 410-434.

One more point should be mentioned in the context of this research. This has got to do with the ways in which ecclesiastical authority developed and acquired a privileged status in Merseyside Catholicism. If nowhere else, it can be argued that a type of authoritarian Catholicism developed with a moral stamp and a corresponding form of parish organisation, all of its own for which perhaps no exact parallel can be found in Roman Catholicism elsewhere in England. In describing the local setting of Formby Catholics, at least of those of the new housing estate, attention was drawn to the fact that ties with Liverpool based Catholicism were found to be considerable among the newcomers. Without pressing this point any further, it became apparent from the interviews on beliefs that the collective image of Church authority was strongly present in the replies. At the risk of repeating what was said in the relevant chapter, it should be remembered that the Irish immigrant community in the 19th century grew up and expanded in a hostile environment in which the Church was unwittingly called upon to provide a socio-cultural basis for an alien minority who until recently had little or no share in the main stream of English national, cultural and political life. As a result, the Church because of these enforced circumstances had to furnish for the immigrant community not only indices of religious allegiance but also marks of social identification which in their turn reinforced the basic soci-religious values of the under-privileged community. Following Durkheim, one might say that a concordance arose between the subjective world of religious faith and the social structure in which this faith was externalised, mirrored and acted out. The church in her imposed task of acculturation had to foster morality in order to keep control of the situation. It is not surprising that both parish and priest became powerful instruments for the enforcement of Catholic values seen through ethnic spectacles.[5]

Having set out the parameters, it is now time to return to the group and consider the attitudes to the 'authority of the Church'. In our interviews

---

5. See C. Ward, Priests and People, Liverpool University Press, 1961.

with the respondents we were particularly interested to discover to what extent they favoured democratisation of the Church under the overarching image of "the people of God". It was assumed at the outset that since the research was focussed on a predominantly middle class community the question of attitudes to forms of ecclesiastical authority, past and present, was likely to take on special significance. The new Catholic middle class is generally believed to be the outspoken critics of the traditional outlook of the Church. Thus David Martin[6] has suggested that social mobility, in creating a Catholic middle class in closer contact with Protestants and Humanists of similar status, will lead to divergence from Catholic norms.

Taking these factors into account, let us now present the findings on the various value images of the Church as the people perceived them.

Attitudes to the new image of the Church

On being asked "How do you see the authority structure of the Church today?" respondents gave three more or less overlapping sets of answers. Some 50% of the sample said that the Church's function is to advise the people on matters of faith and morals, and not to dictate policies of behaviour. Throughout this group there was a strong feeling that the age of clerical dominance was over and that the layman has come into his own. A comment given was: "Truth does not percolate down the hierarchical ladder to be passively received by the obedient lay man. The time that the clergy wrapped the truths of the faith in packages for general distribution has gone". There was, too, a realisation that education was partly a contributory force in the displacement of traditional deference by Catholics to the authority of the Church. Particularly, those over 50 regarded education as a prime cause

---

6. D. Martin, Church, Denomination & Society, ch. 12 in M. Hill, (ed.), A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain, 5, SCM Press, 1972, pp. 184-191.

alongside factors such as affluence, social mobility and assimilation of Catholics into the wider society. As one very old respondent put it: "It never occurred to us to question the priest. He had all the answers, but today young Catholics want reasons and explanations for everything. What happens to the mystery of our faith if everything in it has to be accounted for?" Contrast this answer to one given by a young couple: "It is not that we question the authority of the Church on issues of faith and morals, but the way in which it is imposed on us as though we are children". A key informant serving on one of the interparochial committees while welcoming the recent attempts by Church authorities to enter into consultative relationship with lay people said: "The clergy though well intentioned and sympathetic towards the changes appear to me confused. They really cannot let go and seem to be pulled by some invisible power in the way they listen to our deliberations on parish management and related matters."

Without saying that the existing authority structures are irrelevant, it was felt by most in this group that its function should be consultative analogous to that of a chairman presiding over committees in modern organisations. The term 'chairman' was frequently dropped during the interviews. For example, ten persons in this group suggested that the Pope, bishops and priests should have the same status as chairmen. A comment was: "The Pope, bishops and priests should, each in his own sphere of authority, act like a chairman who takes the final decision when everybody has been heard". One young respondent being a member of the executive committee of a youth club, ventured the opinion "that the Pope should have the same status as the British monarch, a symbol of fatherhood and Christian community". Similar suggestions were offered by older persons as well. "Pope John, "one respondent said, "was the first pope to discard monarchical rule".

Though the representatives of this group were unanimous in saying that authority should be exercised in a consultative manner at diffent institutional levels, the rest of the sample, approximately 50%, showed

reservation about how consultative authority should be realized in the present circumstances. Whereas most in this group were in favour of change, no clear consensus emerged on how the new image of the Church as the people of God could be fitted into ideas of democratic organisation. Two sub-groups emerged within this group with opposing concepts of authority; for the one (20 persons) it was seen as a moral value of the highest order, whereas for the other (25 persons) it was regarded as instrumental, administratively, in achieving the highest amount of efficiency within the institution in the pursuit of its goals. Characteristic of both sub-groups was uncertainty and doubt as to the notion of participation, in view of the monolithic structure of the Church based on divine authority. An example of this uncertainty was given by one person: "The obsession with authority is something new in history. Man may be changing; but I do not see how the Church can give up two thousand years of history without losing her identity". Another person said: "The idea of infallibility is so deeply ingrained in us that once you start tinkering with it the very thing which made the Church what it is collapses with nothing left".

Taking the sub-group who in the main considered authority as a moral value, their chief concern was with preserving what they thought to be essential for the survival of the Church. Several pointed out that since the traditional notion of God has disappeared, or is in a stage of fragmentation among Catholics, the justifications for established moral beliefs and practices were bound to suffer a similar fate. One respondent reflecting on this point remarked: "We have gone through demythologizing the Gospel and most of the doctrines of the Church. If the God of our Fathers is, as our modern theologians tell us, absent or dead or to be refashioned according to the ideas of our modern age, then I do not see how our faith can retain its moral character which it used to have". The respondents in this group though accepting the authority of the ecclesiastical leaders with reservation were unwilling to see their authority be swallowed up by the layman and were

opposed to abolishing the distinction of clergy and lay people in the sphere of authority. They believed that it is up to the Church itself to modify its patterns of authority in consultation with the laity without getting into a panic. Dogmatic fixations cannot be undone at the stroke of a pen. The refrain in the replies here was: "We are too imprisoned in the past", or, "We are not ready for such changes yet". Generally speaking, the members of this group felt that to speak of democratizing the Church in the abstract is nonsense and opens the gate for chaos "with every Tom, Dick and Harry doing his thing from his point of view without a guideline leads to moral chaos". This view was expressed variously, as the following quotations illustrate A housewife said: "If you are a parent, you begin to have sympathy for the dilemmas of the Church and the parish. I have teenagers. I have to give guidance to them, but I have to fall back on some stand even if I cannot defend it. Otherwise, how do you end up?" A middle aged couple: "We do expect guidance, but not definite answers. How this guidance is to be given we do not know, but there must be some basis from which to go." A young couple: "The Church was once our conscience; now we have to be our own conscience, but how can this be done unless we have something to be guided by? There are too many competing organisations in our life."

It was stated earlier in this chapter that the basic values of the Church, like those of any other institution in industrial society, have become apparently dependent on the sentiments and attitudes of its members. However, it is by no means clear in what exact ways personal sentiments and activities become crystallized into newly developing norms. This is especially so since such norms do not arise from within the institution only, but also from informal interaction with the wider society. Those who looked upon authority as a value feared its partial desacralization and the accompanying loss of its legitimacy. Comparing the traditional functions of ecclesiastical authority to those of a modern chairman appeared to them a weakening of the sacred power whose locus is God. The rationalization of authority on purely utilitarian

grounds also appeared to them as undermining the source of moral authority invested in the hierarchy of the Church. It is worthwhile to recall Durkheim's attempt to combine obligation, desirability and sacredness into the category of the moral imperative. "Morality", he says, "would no longer be morality if it had no element in religion". Arguing that sacredness and morality are closely related, he shrewdly remarks "that the more sacred a moral rule becomes, the more the element of obligation tends to recede".[1] Conversely, we could say that the more obligation is stripped of its sacred character, the less it is felt binding on those who tend to detach it from its source. More will be said about the desacralization of the power of the Church later on when the role of the priest will be discussed according to the apperceptions of the respondents.

The sub-group who were more interested in the instrumentality of authority in the achievement of goals than in the preservation of its moral value contended that the exercise of authority should reflect changing conditions in which Catholics have to live.

These respondents took for granted that authority structures should reflect the actual conditions of the community and take account of the social composition of its people. Like the previous groups, they showed scepticism about the new image of the Church as the people of God and how this idea is to be translated into a reality. They saw a hiatus between ideal and fact in the present confrontation of the Church with the world. As one respondent cogently put it: "It is one thing to proclaim that we are the people of God, quite another to make it work in a Church which does not show that it is willing to surrender its power in any real sense to the laity". This can be illustrated by quoting their views on how they see the parish and the diocese where lay people are invited to take part in decision making. To begin with the parish of St. Jerome itself. As was said earlier, the parish has no church building of its own. Though no question was asked whether the people would like to have a church, more than half of the respondents

---

1. Durkheim, op.cit., p.70, pp.68-72.

volunteered information about its feasibility. The majority who expressed their views said that they were quite content with the parish hall symbolising the open boundaries of Catholicism, whereas a minority including native Formbyites and newcomers thought that a proper church building was necessary for worship. Some key informants who were involved in this project said that whereas the majority of the parishioners appeared to be content with this state of affairs, it was the priest who would like to have a church. They did not, of course, doubt the legitimacy of his desire, but, as one informant put it: "Here we are. The so-called people of God are over-ruled. We are encouraged to look beyond parochial boundaries, but the priest wants us to have the old symbol without us being able to have a real say in it". Similar experiences were reported by key informants who have a stake in the available parish organisations. One of those serving on the committee of the Mothers' Union summed up her attitude as follows: "There is no real dialogue on fundamental issues concerning the life of the parish. The priests invited to talk to us are sympathetic enough, but they seem over-anxious to defend orthodoxy according to official directives". The mixture of enlightened dogmatism and irrelevance, of benign sympathy and blissful ignorance, was seen as a confusing factor in the legitimation of authority in its new garb. The same sort of criticism was levelled against the post-Vatican episcopy. Because there is no community around the bishop, but only a congeries of administrative offices, official Catholicism has no direct way of reaching the people and communicating with them. Consequently, there is, at present, a mixture of theoretical democracy and concealed authoritarianism. These bureaucratic organs tend to employ priests and laymen, who are pipelines to the hierarchy and whose task is to interpret dutifully the prevailing mind of authority to those down the ladder. Thus the freedom to grow up, which is an essential part of the people of God, is limited in advance and geared to manipulative policies on the part of ecclesiastical leaders. This situation was well understood by the respondents in their attempts to evaluate the ways in which ecclesiastical leaders go about the projection of the ideals propagated by Vatican II by fitting them into structures which are in

accordance with perceived goals and ends at a national and local level. Thus ecclesiastical expectations of what is 'good' for diversified communities fall short of those entertained by people who are no longer prepared to invest their clergy with charismatic qualities. This came out in many ways from the replies. Without running ahead of the inquiry, it became apparent from indirect remarks that the modern episcopacy falls between two stools. It seeks, on the one hand, to be democratic in stressing the co-responsibility of all Catholics regardless of their social and cultural position in advancing the Kingdom of God, but, on the other, it sets limits on this advancement without clearly explicating the grounds and motives for doing so. This has resulted in an impasse in the bright promises adumbrated in the blue-prints of Vatican II. Commenting on this state of affairs, 20 persons observed that Catholics have reached a stalemate and have lost interest in the antics of officialdom.

Attitudes to ecumenism

The image of the Church as the people of God is closely connected with the Church's new understanding of its relationship with the other Christian bodies. It is worth noting that Vatican II in the redefinition of its nature and function shies away from simply identifying 'the Mystical Body' with 'the Roman Catholic Church'. This is not to say that there is no relationship, but to suggest that there is not complete and exclusive identity of the two terms. The Constitution On the Church is careful to say that the body 'subsists in' the Catholic Church which is governed by the Pope and the bishops (art.8). The phrase 'subsists in' leaves open a way for understanding how other Christians are incorporated into Christ through baptism.

Contained in this phrase is the notion that the mystery of the Church does no longer coincide with its juridical and sociological boundaries. Since the publication of the conciliar decree on ecumenism, it is no longer possible

to speak of the Catholic Church without implying the other Churches in one way or another. The modification of the Tridentine conception of the Church as 'the perfect society', embodying the Kingdom of God exclusively in a monolithic organisation, has led many Catholics to believe that they are no longer living in the same Church. Besides this, the fact that confusion began to spread through the rank and file of the Catholic world after the first period of enthusiasm had petered out alerted many Catholics to the inability of the local hierarchies to clarify the intrinsic reasons for the ecumenical movement. This inability came to light when policies and strategies had to be devised for applying abstract ideas to empirical reality. It was unavoidable that in the period of trial and error certain ambiguities generated by the Vatican II documents themselves began to be noticed by Catholics and non-Catholics alike. For example, whereas the Church sees itself afresh as "in service to the world", it also acknowledged in the same breath that it has no proper mission in the political, economic and social order. These and other inconsistencies soured the progressive left on church leadership, on the one hand, and alienated on the other conservative Catholics. But more importantly, the movement for Church unity and related matters raised once more for ordinary Catholics the question of how the teaching authority and its corresponding structures should be reinterpreted at grass root level once the theological dust had settled down. This inadequate but necessary outline of the ecumenical climate sets the background for respondents' responses to the question: "Are you in favour of the ecumenical movement?" The question fell upon unreceptive ears and caused, upon the whole, little stir. The majority, 87%, stated that they were in favour of church unity, and only 13% expressed disapproval or some doubt.

To take the majority view first. The main view was that the movement for the union of Churches is desirable on ethical grounds in an age when the ideal of the universal brotherhood of man has become everywhere a common place in spite of and regardless of the reforming Church itself. The Churches, it was said, are merely taking their cues from the modern world which has no

use for dogmatic declarations and fixations. "We are living in a time", one person said, "in which fusions and amalgamations of firms, organizations and collectivities are the order of the day. The Churches have to do the same thing if they want to survive and can no longer afford to cultivate their own back garden". They remarked that it is a bit late in the day to get Catholics on the ecumenical "band wagon" after having been taught for so long that the Catholic Church is the only true Church. "It is a tall order", a comment ran, "to expect Catholics to give up their faith in the uniqueness of their Church. Once you start messing with it, you might as well pack up". While all these respondents showed sympathy for the new emphasis in the field of interdenominational understanding of the Christian message, stripped of sectarian prejudices and hardened positions, they indicated little interest in modern developments in this respect. This was expressed several times in different wordings amounting to the same thing, that is, boredom with the question of a possible fusion of the Churches in the foreseeable future. As one female respondent put it forcibly: "All this fuss about church unity bores me to death. Tolerance of and mutual understanding of other people's points of view in religion and morals is already part of suburban living. We do not need the Church to tell us that we ought to be charitable with our separated brethren. I have always thought that Christianity was about love of God and one's neighbour. It makes you sad to think that after two thousand years the Churches wake up to the fact that we ought to do something about it". Thus the consensus of the majority was that pluralism in inter-denominationalism had to be accepted without mystifying it. Organisational union on their account is neither important nor relevant since it is happening already in the field of common living in a suburban setting where newcomers and indigenous Formbyites form relationships apart from and beyond those dictated by their respective churches.

Yet, as could be expected, residual opposition to the ecumenical movement was found to be strong in the views of those who threw doubt on its legitimacy. Representing a small minority, their attitudes were, nevertheless, of great interest in probing the transformation of Merseyside Catholicism.

Their disapproval and doubt rested on the idea that the movement for church union is a sign of weakness in organised religion itself. Their main justification for this was put forward by appealing to the present state of belief which is no longer consistently held either in content or in the traditional manner. Citing the theological pluralism prevalent in the Church as evidence, several pointed out that "the content of belief is corroded beyond recognition as it has fallen prey to different schools of thought which are allowed to nibble at traditional teaching as the latest fancy moves them". As one respondent expressed it: "Once you are not sure about what to believe, you'll look for any ally in bolstering up your uncertainty". The Church in their view has done itself an ill-service on embarking on a perilous journey the aim of which is to "look for a common denominator to fit every and each Christian Church". They deplored the contemporary trend in the Christian Churches to stress ethics and its relevance to social justice at the expense of doctrinal integrity. "Christ", as one remarked, "is foremost seen as a social reformer who has come to deliver society from social inequality, never mind his teaching about God". Mentioned in particular by the members of this group was the fear of loss of doctrinal identity. They doubted whether the Churches should lose their separate identities for the sake of merging on ethical grounds. One remark is enough to illustrate this fear: "Ecumenism", one person said "looks to me a melting pot. We will probably end up with a wishy-washy humanism under the label of Christianity. Where do you stop?". Revealing, also, was the view that to strive for organisational unity and fusion would inevitably result in scrapping ecclesiastical structures and in making nonsense of the legitimacy of authority. As a person said: "If we are going to have a fusion and combination of authorities, what will happen to the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury? They will become in the end mere symbols to which nobody feels any allegiance". Thus the representatives of this view were found to be in two minds about ecumenism. Though approving, like the rest, of the new understanding of what Christians have in common, they, nevertheless, showed concern with the question of identity and its preservation and continuation against the background of social change.

It is worth relating these reported attitudes to what was found empirically in Formby and to discover what sort of correspondence existed between what was said and what is the case. For this reason we had to fall back on explanations proferred by some key-influentials and informants who, at the time of the research, were involved in varying degrees in fostering the ecumenical movement. As was mentioned in Chapter III, there exists in Formby the Formby Association of Churches founded in the early 60s. Its purpose is to promote Christian unity in the "village" among Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Congregationalists and Methodists. Soon after its foundation interdenominational discussion groups were founded, but they did not last very long as interest began to wane. One of the initial ideas was to have once a year a type of ecumenical service in which all the Formby denominations were to participate. Together with this idea a resolution was adopted to help financially a poor village somewhere in the third world. A village in India was chosen and a considerable amount of money collected from all Christians in support of this scheme. Besides this, speakers were invited to speak on themes of Christian unity, but this, after some initial successes, came to little. Later on, a Formby show was organised by the seven Formby Churches which turned out to be a local festivity of great pleasure for the Formbyites and visitors, but little practical result came out of it in fostering the interdenominational bonds in the village. This, at least, was the picture given by those who played some role in this association. The investigator took some pains in checking Catholic accounts with those given by non-Catholics. One important key-influential representing the Catholic side summed up his experience as follows: "Actual membership was at first very good. The Good-Friday walk in 1973 had about 1,000 participants from the local Churches, most of them being Anglicans and Roman Catholics. The unity-services, too, were reasonably attended, once every month; sermons were good and prayers well attuned to local and universal needs. But if you consider the total population of Christians in Formby, then participation was very minimal". This account was confirmed by the investigator talking to some Anglican committee members. Several points of interest emerged which threw light on respondents' attitude to ecumenism. These points deserve

spelling out because they dispel the rosy view of ecumenism as something embraced tout court by Catholics and non-Catholics alike. As some key-influentials pointed out, the practical problem is to leave traditional doctrines which may appear offensive unstated, and whenever it is convenient in the circumstances, to gloss them over, and yet to create a sense of specific belonging to the Church of one's birth and allegiance. Thus we come up with the problem in preaching and services of how to respect people's religious identity and yet to harness religious differences to a common denominator which promotes 'religion in general'.

The Church, as one key-influential said, is caught in an inextricable bind, "it has to promote a tendency to a generalised ideal of ethical Christianity and by doing so it risks a loss of basic identity in its members". The flattening out of doctrine in common worship creates different sorts of latent tensions in the people and the clergy when viewed as an interdenominational community. Roman Catholic priests tend to preserve doctrinal differences though they endorse in principle the ethicalism of prevailing trends. Lay people feel this tension and do not know how to overcome it in practical ways. "It is extremely difficult", one of these key-influentials said, "to know what doctrines to leave out in promoting good rel ationships among inter-denominational Christians. Anglicans are not averse to the cult of Our Lady, for example, while other Christians, like Methodists, are. Directions from above are not helpful. Catholic priests have been very co-operative in the promotion of Christian unity, but they are, obviously, influenced by what is thought proper by their bishops". The clergy, it was said, have a vested interest in the maintenance of certain doctrinal beliefs and in keeping their ideological content free from contamination. They are professionals and can hardly be blamed for keeping counsel with themselves because they still regard themselves as the expositors of doctrines and values. One instance of this situation was cited and serves as an illustration of the mystification surrounding interdenominational services. This concerns especially the

Eucharist. "It is odd", several of the key-influentials remarked, "that although the Eucharist is regarded as the symbol of Christian unity and reconciliation, some invisible barrier is placed on it when it comes down to allowing Anglicans to receive Holy Communion during Our Mass. No good reasons are ever given for this exclusion". It was felt that some arbitrariness on the part of ecclesiastical authorities is at work in justifying one course of co-operation over another.[1] What people look for is not a resolution of doctrinal differences but for a real force of good-will in the practical spheres of life.

Revealing in this respect were also some of the casual remarks given by some non-Catholic members, especially by those who belong to the Anglican community. While being in full sympathy with what is being done by the Formby organisation of Churches, they expressed awareness of the dilemmas of inter-communion for Catholics and Anglicans alike. "Catholics", one Anglican housewife explained," are in two minds about Anglican ministers. Many of the Catholics I know would like to accord to them the same status as Catholic priests have, but they do not get over this difficulty of the validity of Anglican orders". Another respondent, an Anglican husband, spoke in a similar vein. "Catholics", he said, "are now in the process of demystifying the priesthood and begin to wean themselves away from the old magical conception of it. But all this takes time and cannot be done overnight. "These respondents

---

1. A local Pastoral Plan says "..It may be said that, except in very rare circumstances...non-Catholics cannot receive Holy Communion - e.g. at a Nuptual Mass or a Requiem Mass", p.5
Pastoral Plan for the Archdiocese of Liverpool, 1976. The demand for inter-communion flowed naturally from the conciliar teaching and the new emphasis of the importance on the local church. But the Council's position on this point remained ambiguous in spite of the desire of many Catholics to celebrate the Eucharist with non-Catholics. The Council had said that sharing in the Eucharist could not be used 'indiscriminately' as a means to unity, since it was the expression of unity already achieved! Papal reactions to interfaith Eucharistic celebrations deploring acts of intercommunion which are contrary to the correct ecumenical line (18th September, 1968) drove attempts by Catholics to initiate intercommunion services underground. For this reason it is hard to obtain information about it, but a well-informed witness, writing in 1975, observed that in England intercommunion "... is increasingly common at home", Ecumenism in England since the Council, in The Month, March 1975, p. 74.

approved of the recent agreements on Eucharist and ministry, but were sceptical about their implementation because these agreements have been made by theologians of both communities at a highly abstract level. It was pointed out that it was one thing to get experts on ironing out theological differences; quite another to convince people of the subtleties and intricacies of the arguments involved. People cannot wait for ever until all the ambiguities are resolved by theological experts.[2.]

Attitudes to the parish community as the image of the People of God

In order to explore a little further the matter of the crisis of the moral authority of the Church, it was necessary to elicit the group's views on how they saw their commitment to the parish of St. Jerome. The Catholic parish is still regarded as a territorial unit, despite the fact that it may have lost much of its traditional function. For one thing, the parish church is the place where Catholics meet for worship and are informed about the changes in the Church; for another, the new idea that the Church is truly present in the local church representing a segment of the People of God has, of course, a bearing on how they see their share in participation and co-responsibility involved in this idea. One of the paradoxes of the post-Vatican period was that it witnessed anti-institutional feelings and at the same time it saw a proliferation of newly devised institutions, all designed to give some sort of expression to the idea of co-responsibility. So new consultative bodies arose where none had existed before. The parish pastoral council became in the late 60s an immediate concern. It was followed by the establishment

---

2. How ambiguities are handled by theologians can be seen, for example, in Authority in the Church (Venice 1976), agreed by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission composed of experts on both sides. The document is neither a declaration by the Roman Catholic Church nor by the Anglican Communion insofar as they are collective bodies. The Agreement does not authorise any change in the existing ecclesial structures but merely points out points of common interest without coming up with practical solutions.

of diocesan pastoral councils, national priests' senates and other mediating bodies to forge links between them.[1] As was pointed out earlier, St. Jerome's has nothing like what Dr. Ward described in his study of St. Catherine's in the line of formal organisations. The only association to survive is the Union of Catholic Mothers and the Youth Club, which bear some resemblance to the old associations which played an important part in the transmission of Catholic values in the past. St. Jerome's, however, has a parish council and its membership reflects the social composition of the housing estate. To begin with, the overwhelming majority of those interviewed showed no interest in the parish council and were only vaguely aware of its function.

There was little evidence to show that the group as a whole attributed much importance to it or thought that its existence represents a model of lay participation. Articulate comments were few. It was generally felt that the modern idea of authority, if it is to be effective, must gain consent, and that consent can only be given when those involved have been able to take a real part in the various steps leading up to the final decision. However, such participation, several pointed out, is a pipe dream. As one respondent who said that he had a considerable amount of experience of how parish councils work observed: "It is clearly impossible for a parish council to represent the spectrum of opinion among modern Catholics, let alone to transpose them into links in decision making along the chain of participation. It just cannot be done". The modern parish is not a parliament but a kind of dialogue in

---

1. Not all dioceses in England managed to get a diocesan pastoral council, but the archdiocese of Liverpool has one and what it should be was well sketched out by Archbishop Beck when he set up his own: "The Church's life does not flow down from the Pope through bishops and clergy to a passive laity; it springs from the grass-roots of the People of God; and the function of authority is co-ordination, authentication and, in exceptional cases, control .." quoted in The Liverpool Diocesan Pastoral Council by John Fitzsimons in The Clergy Review, September 1968, pp. 61-72.

which everyone at his or her level has a share in responsibility, but, as the same respondent pointed out, "it all comes down to endless talk, and in the end someone has to take the final plunge." This view was endorsed 7 persons who said that they were involved as committee members in parish and inter-parochial activities. In their view lay people and priest are bound to represent different spheres of interest in the running of the parish without having a clear indication of how border disputes about demarcation lines are to be resolved. An example of this situation was already given in the case where a number of parishioners were content with keeping the parish hall as a centre for parish activities and as a place for worship while the priest would like to have a proper church building. As one key informant put it: "The position of the priest today is worse than that of his predecessor: he has to seek advice and having obtained it he must sometimes reject it". Similarly, the commitment by the parishioners to the few associations and clubs was not deemed a basic source of participation. If the old sodalities and confraternities like the St. Vincent the Paul's society, the Legion of Mary - to mention but a few - provided once for their members a programme for spiritual self improvement and growth in the religious life, their modern equivalents showed little of this in the evaluation of the respondents. It was not only the case that they were seen as being stripped of their ancillary function in the fostering of Catholic beliefs and values, but also that their goals were perceived as confusing and vague. These goals do not coincide with those held up as mirrors even among committed members. One or two examples will suffice to illustrate this point. The first refers to SPUC, which draws its membership from the three Roman Catholic parishes. One of the co-founders of this society, a young married woman, summing up her experience of the attitudes of fellow Catholics to the goals of the society said: "You would expect that Catholics as a whole are against abortion, but I experienced confusion in the minds of those who joined. Traditionally minded Catholics in the village dropped out because they thought that the society was not dogmatic enough about abortion. They wanted something like Pope Paul's ruling on birth control and blamed the Church for not being as

forthright enough as in the case of birth control. Those who were active were not at all clear about all the issues involved. Only a few can argue for the reform of the abortion law on strictly Catholic grounds! From this discussion it can be seen that the Parish system is not deemed as a form through which the moral authority of the Church can be disseminated.

Attitudes to Catholic Education is another example. The Catholic Parents' Association draws its membership from the three parishes. Its purpose is to get for Catholics in Formby their own secondary school. Since the introduction of primary and secondary education system, Formby Catholic children have had to transfer to Crosby at the Sectondary level.[1] Under the system currently operating, Formby Catholic children go to either of one of the two Direct Grammar Schools: Seafield (girls) or St.Mary's (boys), or to St. Joseph's Secondary Modern School. It has been the wish of the Formby Catholic Parents to have a secondary High School of their own, but such a project would not be possible until it was ratified by the respective authorities.[2]

---

1. Much of the information on this question was kindly provided by the Chairman of The Formby Catholic Parents' Association. Catholics being about 30% of the total population think that their request for a Catholic Comprehensive School is reasonable. In 1972 the time when the research was carried out, the result of the census carried out November/December, 1972, at the three parishes in Formby showed that there are 939 Catholic children of Primary School age living in Formby. Of these 738 children attend the Catholic Aided Primary Schools. In addition there are 124 Catholic children in various Catholic private and preparatory schools shared out among the three parishes of which St. Jerome's has the lion's share. According to the Chairman, the majority of parents have indicated that they would send their children to a Formby Catholic High School if one was in existence. The reasons given by Catholic Parents for sending their children to the County controlled primary schools are almost exclusively to enable their children to proceed to the Formby High School because there is a total lack of Catholic Secondary Education provided at Formby.

2. Compare this with A. Greeley's finding reported in Catholic School in a Declining Church, Sheed and Ward, INC, Kansas City, 1976. According to this study support for the Catholic school system continuous among 90% of American Catholics in spite of the hierarchy's reluctance to continue the parochial schools because of lack of funds. Op. cit., p. 305 et seq.

On being asked whether they approve of specific Catholic schools, over 80% said that they did, whereas the remaining 20% expressed doubt. The majority felt that although children ought to be imbued with Catholic values, it has become increasingly difficult to know what specific values ought to be transmitted and by whom, particularly in view of the fact that the traditional religious teaching orders are on the way out. Of the three Catholic infants' schools in Formby, one of them is run by nuns who are no longer able to teach children because of lack of personnel and other internal difficulties. Of those who were anxious to have Catholic schooling, only 4% took a firm stand on the Catholic content of this schooling. Respondents believed that children should receive religious instruction of some sort based on the new interpretations of the Catholic faith and its values, but that this could be accomplished equally well in non-Catholic schools as long as there were sufficient guarantees for qualified religious teachers. A substantial proportion in this category thought that a religious syllabus even if constructed on Catholic lines and embodying priorities was a thing of the past when universal education is becoming less and less tied up with religion of any kind. A comment given was: "You cannot have it both ways. You either hold on to being a Catholic in the old way or not. The first alternative has gone because there are many ways of being a Catholic today; the second is to get on with what you think can be salvaged from the collapse of denominational schools". Yet over half of the respondents in the same group said that they regretted the hollowing out of religious teaching in either Catholic or non-Catholic schools. According to them ecumenism demands a breaking up of 'ghetto-mentalities' with the result that the whole issue of the preservation of Catholic values is in jeopardy. "We are", one teacher said, "experiencing a social revolution which, as yet, the Churches in this country seem unable to discern. The Catholic Church wants us to participate fully in the educational and political life of the nation with the other Churches, but it seems unwilling to recognise that its privileged position is finished. It keeps nursing sore spots which mean little to us". Reflecting on the idea of the People of God

in the context of education, the same person said: " I do regret the break down of our Catholic heritage, but we are no longer reduced to a sect on the margin of society. If we are to be the People of God we must accept the consequences of this in education as well without getting steamed up about it. But we are still a long way off".

Those respondents who expressed doubt and reservation about Catholic schools based their views on the ways in which a suburban community has to adjust itself to conditions which have nothing in common with what they called the 'triple alliance of parish, family and school' which once constituted the core of the value system in Merseyside Catholicism. Education, according to these respondents, is largely concerned with initiation into the culture of a particular society, but it is also concerned with the direction in which this culture is moving under various pressures, and the choices which have to be made within the evolving structures. The old label 'Catholic' covers for them a cargo of many products some of which are odd bed fellows in the context of the wider culture.[2.] One answer of this attitude illustrates the point: "We are all in the same boat in Formby as regards income, mobility and housing. This requires a kind of common symbolism in which you cannot harp on what makes you different from your neighbour, least of all in religion". The sort of society - they pointed out - we are living in, needs new rules of moral conduct partly derived from the old Catholic culture and partly from technological society. Catholic education as a thing of value by itself is bound to suffer in the process of assimilation. For the representatives of this group in particular, the Church was no longer seen as a 'single moral community' in which education takes a central position. The ambiguities surrounding attitudes to Catholic education became evident in the responses of some of the key informants.

It is worth quoting in this context the editor of The Clergy Review, April, 1972, when he defines the Catholic stance: "To wear one's Catholicism as a mark of individual distinction, as a means of separating oneself off from other people, is to distort it, offering a false image to the world..." p.249. This description fits in well with that offered by theologians who define the modern Catholic as an 'anonymous' Christian. See, for example, Karl Rahner, Der Anonyme Christ, nach Karl Rahner, Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie, 86, 1964, pp. 286-303.

One of these describing himself as an initiator of the move for Catholic secondary education in Formby said: "We are, in fact, a pressure group in the community at odds with different values represented by different establishments. We have to accept the Archdiocesan Schools' Commission recognised by the Ministry of Education, and cannot work against them since both have an agreed policy on whether or not a specific Catholic school is called for in a certain area depending on the numerical strength of Catholic children in it and other considerations laid down by the Government. Yet here we are: we neither want to comply with the Archdiocese nor with the Lancashire Education authorities. We want to do our own thing irrespective of the institutions involved and in doing so come up with contradictory positions in the community". Explaining his own attitude, this person said: "I doubt whether all this talk about Catholic secondary education in Formby is really a matter of vital interest to the Catholics in Formby. It appears to me that most Catholic parents are not so much interested in what you may call 'Catholic education' for its own sake as a value to be preserved and continued. You see Formby children proceed to Secondary Education, for example, at Crosby. This means that they must travel 6 - 7 miles on buses or train. Pupils use existing bus services, frequently entailing long delays. It is only natural that parents would like to have their children attend a school which is near and provides the facilities for secondary education. But this is different from the question whether or not there should be a Catholic comprehensive or grammar school in Formby". In the light of these views it appeared that the religious function of the Catholic school was for the overwhelming majority a problematic issue with different levels of contestation perceived according to different needs. Attitudes in this respect appeared to be determined not purely by ideological concerns but also by the practical necessities of modern suburban life. As one young housewife put it: "We are poised between different worlds of values. I want my children to be Catholics, but neither my view of what this means nor what they learn in the Infants' school measures up with what goes on in the family. It is like a script you have no control of, but which you have to act out in order to survive".

In conclusion, the function of the Catholic school as a transmitter of values appeared to be extremely ambiguous. As Durkheim observed the moral imperative is based on three interconnected elements: obligation, desirability and sacredness. Considering what has been said so far, it is clear that the sacred element in Catholic education is disconnected. Catholics of the sample felt that education is a value worth preserving, but at the same time they appeared to be hesitant to give it a definite moral position in the overall religious system, which in any case is fragmented. Wishing to preserve what is best in the Catholic tradition, they are, nevertheless, confronted with the problem of adaptation and accommodation in the wider culture which is neither alien nor in harmony with Catholic tradition. Thus the encapsulation of the middle class community with its links with historical Catholicism shows a Janus faced mentality: it is on the one hand a 'route-finding' activity and at the same time it suffers from the dead weight of the tradition. It is now time to explore further the perceptions of the group as to the role and function of the priest as the legitimator and manipulator of the sacred.

General attitudes to the priesthood

The priest today is a kind of barometer of the climate of the institutional Church and at the same time a man involved in the problems of the local community he is bound to serve. He is a middle man negotiating between the claims of the Church and the aspirations and expectations of his flock. Above all, he is the institutional link between the Church in change and the people to whom he is committed in virtue of his calling and profession. What is of decisive importance has been an almost imperceptible shift of emphasis in the understanding of the nature of the priesthood itself, since the formulations offered by Vatican Council II. The Council of Trent had defined the priest as a man endowed with special almost magical powers, but it did not include the preaching of the Word in its definition, since that smacked of Protestantism with its emphasis on the individual interpretation by the minister of the Word

of God amidst the congregation. Vatican II found this inadequate and re-defined the priest in relation to the Word of God which he has to preach. Moreover, the Council of Trent had discerned a common 'essence', an ontological status, which defined the priesthood: The priest was someone who had the power to 'effect' something with regard to the Mass and Confession. His power was as magical as that of the central doctrine of the Incarnation. Curiously, Vatican Council II did not pay much attention to the question of the priesthood. It emphasised the collegiality of the bishops and the importance of the laity as the People of God. This left the modern Catholic priest sandwiched between the upper echelons of power and the emerging layman with a theology of ministry which formed a middle way between seeing the priest as the minister ex opere operato, and as one whose traditional sacred status was weakened. This manipulation on the part of the reforming Church left the modern priest high and dry. Much of this shift in emphasis will occupy us when we discuss in the next chapter the images of the liturgical community in which the role of the priest as the magical operator will be viewed through the eyes of the respondents. In a sociological perspective, it could be said that the modern Catholic priest is no longer seen as the living embodiment of sacrality. In the context of this research it must be pointed out that the traditional social role of the Catholic priest in Merseyside was somewhat special because of historical reasons concerning the Irish immigrant community. Previous researchers have all thrown light on the traditional social role of the Catholic priest in Merseyside.[1.]

---

1. Apart from the studies by Dr. Ward and Dr. Brothers who investigated Merseyside Catholicism in transformation, it is worthwhile to quote the historian, R.B Walker, 'Religious changes in Liverpool in the Nineteenth Century' in Journal of Ecclesiastical History, XIX, No. 2, October, 1968, p. 200, when he says "the Roman Catholic priest to the poor of his own district was policeman, doctor, relieving officer, nuisance and school board inspector, as well as spiritual father..." This point is also alluded to by Dr. J.B. Mays' study of the importance of the parish priest as a social leader in Growing Up in the City: A study of Juvenile Delinquency in an Urban Neighbourhood, Liverpool University Press, sec. impression, 1956, p. 54, passim.

Against this background the question of what respondents thought of the role of the priest in the community assumed special significance. On being asked: "What do you think the task of the priest is?" respondents warmed up and freely volunteered information. The word 'Father', as one respondent put it, "sums up a world of affection and respect, a father figure in his black suit and Roman dog collar representing a special meaning." "You would never dream", one middle aged woman said, "of calling him by his personal name or to inquire where he came from or who were his parents". Some described the image of the visiting priest in the old days when everybody in the family had to be on tip-toe when the Father came round. An old woman recalling the days of house-visiting said: "When I was a little girl and did something wrong, my mother used to say: "Look out, I will tell the Father if you do this". It was not surprising that over 50% of the respondents thought that 'house visiting' is an essential part of the modern image of the priest, but it was admitted that this was no longer possible when the parish has ceased to be a recognisable unit. They felt that the priest cannot cope with the comings and going of his flock because of the fluidity of the situation in suburban society. "The poor priest",,one young couple said, "has to see his parishioners as fleeting moments in the life of the parish". It was the general concensus that the priest is in a dreadful dilemma: "he has to get to know everybody to be of use, and yet he cannot do this because there are too many people who have no interest in the parish community as such".

To resume: only 13% saw the priest as a sacramental minister who in virtue of his ordination is the dispenser of the sacraments. For them the priest is still a man set apart, a sacred person, symbolising the ontological dimension of the divine. "The priest", as one respondent, a middle aged woman, put it, "is not just a minister but an awesome figure of holiness. I was taught in my youth that he not merely represented Christ but that he was the other Christ in some mysterious way". In their view the priest is set apart from the community and his main function is to be the real bridge between the unseen and the profane realities of ordinary life. His leadership is in the domain

of liturgy, especially in the celebration of the Mass. Recalling the days when the priest came round to see the family, two couples, mostly in the age category of 50 and over, described their impression in vivid colours. For example, a married couple who had known a Liverpool parish before they moved to Formby said: "It was a most solemn occasion when the Father came round. There he was in the black suit and Roman Collar filling the house with fear and respect. You never thought of him as a person , but as some embodied spirit". But even among the representatives of this group, the old image of the sacrality of the priest has lost its appeal. While regarding him as a sacred person, they felt that he was losing his traditional image. This came out in their disapproval of the abandonment of the collar and clerical dress by the modern priest. To see a priest in civies meant for them a debasement of his ontological status. This was expressed by a male respondent: "I do not buy this stuff about priests imitating the layman in dress and going along with the trends of the day. They look to me smart Alecs thinking that they come closer to the people by letting down their hair. They are the worst secularisers and forget their vocation as Men of God".

The rest of the respondents, roughly 87%, rejected the sacramental image of the priest and defined him in terms of 'community-building'. Frequent expressions which appeared in their evaluations were: "the priest for me is the 'creator and animator of the community'; 'a spiritual energiser'; 'a bridge builder in the community'; 'a message bearer and chief communicator'; 'the one who cements the group'; 'a translator of the unseen'; a decoder of the beliefs and values of the group under his care' ", and so forth. The replies showed a move away from the sacred conception of the priest as the man who acts from the principle of ex opere operato.

Thus the majority saw the priest as a mediator to sift and relay knowledge to the parishioners so as to provide a set of rules for them to interpret in their own fashion. He has, so to say, to provide the text because of his professional knowledge of theology and the prevalent ideology of the

institution imposing an authoritative seal on it. Respondents in this group acknowledged that nearly all the priestly functions have gone or are taken over by secular institutes. "If I have marital problems", one young male respondent said, "the last person to consult would be the priest". It was realised by them that the priest cannot be a communicator and creator of a community out of 1,000 households or more. This was well expressed by a young female respondent: "How can the priest in a modern parish like ours be a communicator to so many people? Even if he manages to go round and see them all, how on earth is he getting to know these people intimately? He has to cut himself into a thousand pieces to please everybody". It was suggested that smaller parishes would help, but under the present system this would involve more priests and with the decline in recruitment to the priesthood [2] this idea would be hardly feasible since the Catholic Church is still clinging to the conception of the parish priest as the chief leader of the parish community in the abstract. The respondents as a whole were well aware of the shortage of priests in the archdiocese. As one old respondent put it: "The days when there were three or four priests living in the presbytery are over. We are now having one-horse parishes."

In the present system the parish priest is still appointed by the bishop without the laity being consulted. Five persons suggested that this situation does not really tally with the reality of the suburban parish. The priest should come from the people he is going to serve and his leadership should represent the social structure of the community. As it is, the modern priest while being told that he must be a real part of the People of God is bound to get squeezed between the goals of the institution and those perceived by the people. Sufficient illustration of this has been given. It was

---

2. In the last report on the numerical strength of the clergy in the archdiocese of Liverpool the following picture emerged: the archdiocese contains more than half a million Catholics within its boundaries (now under revision) and its present clerical personnel shows a dangerous imbalance in age groups. See Pastoral Plan, op.cit.

appreciated that the reduction of priestly roles and functions imposed a severe strain on the credibility of the priesthood. Being stripped of his traditional roles he appears somewhat lost. Yet respondents as a whole were reluctant to see him as a social worker, a marriage-counsellor and so on. Though most respondents could not word it, the general impression obtained from indirect remarks was that they value house-visiting for spiritual needs. This was expressed in a telling comment: "We live in an age of professionalism. Catholics can discuss problems of all sorts which normally fell under the competence of the clergy. But it is good to be able to discuss with the priest informally and on an equal basis the things that bother us. After all he has so many resources to draw from". What these respondents were looking for is an openness and sympathy in the priest in his capacity as spiritual adviser, one who suggests rather than commands. Their main critique was directed to the priest's involvement in administrative functions for which he is least equipped because of his training and background. Though the majority see him no longer as the sacred person, his role as communicator was stressed throughout without any clear picture emerging as to how this communicative function is to take shape. The new slogan 'The Ministry is for service' appeared from these replies to be deeply ambiguous in the minds of the group. Pastoral work offers new potentialities and yet bogs down in the uncertainties surrounding the role of the priest.

Attitudes to clerical celibacy

It was only to be expected that the question of celibacy would arise during the interviewing. The question Do you favour optional celibacy? did not stir much excitment and answers to it showed frankness and candour.

This topic was one which did not touch the respondents directly and so it seemed to be one on which they could comment with a certain amount of objectivity. 62% were in favour, 20% opposed it and 18% were not sure. Of those who were in favour, practical concerns played the upper hand in their views. In

general they were concerned about the 'vanishing' priest and about the decline in numbers. The main argument the members of this group brought forward was that unless priests were allowed to marry the Catholic community would have no priests at all. A married clergy, it was said, would relieve the shortage of priests and would be more representative of the community they serve. The last point in particular was commonly stressed as a definite advantage. A recurring theme throughout the replies was that a married clergy would be in a better position to understand personal relationships and especially the complexities of married people. One young couple in commenting on this side of the question said: "How can a bachelor have any inkling of what goes on today in married life? Sympathy is not enough nor a general willingness to listen; real experience is required of the priest to understand some of the problems of personal relationships". 20 female respondents said that they were put off by the average priests when they approached them for advice on personal and sexual matters, not because they were unkind or authoritarian, but simply because the priest's world is a man's world insofar as his training and theological outlook is concerned. "There are few young priests around nowadays", one female respndent remarked, "many priests are in their fifties and it is not fair to demand from them an understanding of modern family life which they have never known". It was not thought, however, that a married priest would be necessarily a better judge and helper, but that he would have a better chance in being an effective communicator in this area. Another line of approach came from the realisation that there are no intrinsic reasons on theological grounds why priests should not be allowed to marry, become part-time priests or take jobs like anybody else in view of the fact that he is more and more eased out of traditional functions and confined to performing liturgical services which are held mostly on Sundays. Though the concept of working, married and part-time priests was only mentioned by a few, theological reasons were frequently mentioned. Those who brought forward this line of argument did not see an essential connection between priesthood and celibacy, and appealed for support to the Anglican tradition. A comment was: "Celibacy is a cultural thing. St. Peter, the first Pope, was a married man".

It is worth recalling that even Vatican II declared that celibacy "is not, indeed, demanded by the very nature of the priesthood, as is evident from the practice of the primitive church and from the tradition of the Eastern churches..."[1]. There was a strong consensus that celibacy is a value in itself, but that it should be freely embraced by those candidates to the priesthood who believe in its charismatic quality.[2]. Other forms of priesthood such as ordaining married men or even married deacons did not figure largely in the replies. As for married deacons, for example, doubts were expressed about their status and functions in the liturgical community when lay people are already distributing Holy Communion, reading lessons and assisting priests in other spheres as well.

Psychological reasons were also given for the dissociation of celibacy and priesthood. Some of these reasons showed how deeply the replies were coloured by past experiences of the local parish and priestly life. As some female respondents pointed out: "Our priest is in a worse position than his predecessor; he neither has the old affection to sustain him, nor other ways to make up for it".

The point made by these respondents was that since the priest has no longer an effective position in the modern parish as he used to have in a type of gemeinschaft community based on ethnic lines he falls between two positions: on the one hand he can no longer rely on the affection of the people whom he serves, since his sacrality is on the wane in the appreciation of Catholics, and, on the other, he is expected to steam on his own without the support of a family. "The priest", one comment was, "carries an intolerable burden: he has to mingle with an anonymous society which sees him as a mere functionary in supplying the parish with liturgical services in which his person is of no account". The opinion of these respondents amounted

1. See Documents of Vatican II: 'On the Ministry and Life of priests' art. 16.
2. Pope Paul in his Encyclical on Priestly Celibacy (1967) reaffirmed the Catholic tradition in the West. But this encyclical was not a result of 'collegial' decision and the collegial process was short-circuited. Collegiality was a concept which the Pope urged on the bishops, but apparently without applying it to himself as head of the episcopal college. None of the respondents were aware of his encyclical.

to saying that there is no point in preserving celibacy as its function has changed.

Those of the group who opposed the idea of optional celibacy were of the opinion that compromise is not possible. The priest in their view because of his vow is married to the community and cannot serve two masters. Celibacy signifies single-mindedness in the service of God and his people. Respondents in this group criticised the trend to what they called 'the debasement' of one of the finest qualities of the Catholic priesthood, that is, the self-effacement of his person for the sake of the Kingdom of God. "Celibacy", one typical answer ran, "is a symbol of transcendence in the morass of sexual and personal vulgarity where everybody thinks that human maturity is not possible without sexual experiences". "It is absolutely nonsense", one of the respondents replied, "to say that the priest is not an integrated personality unless he is married. Tell me how many married people are integrated in the present situation when divorce is the order of the day". In spite of variations, their main objection was that a married clergy would not make a better job of the parish than an unmarried one. The respondents in this group thought that the attempt to get a married clergy was another 'con' to Protestantise the Church and take away the identity of the Roman Catholic Church.

Those who were unsure veered between opposing positions. They felt that the whole question is an 'open one' and should be left to the priests themselves or to the authorities. A solution according to them cannot be forced and must take account of local and national conditions. While recognising that the picture has changed, they felt, upon the whole, that the weight of tradition was a factor to be reckoned with in church renewal because of the emotions it aroused among traditional Catholics. The word 'Father' has too many historical associations to be ignored. The older generation is caught midway in the many changes moulding their perceptions and evaluations of the priesthood whereas the younger generation has already moved away from such perceptions. A middle aged couple, for example, said: "For us the celibate priest has still some meaning which is hard to explain. We see that things

have to change but we cannot get used to the idea of seeing him in civvies without the Roman collar. Our teenage children have no difficulty with that. It is a trifle, but it is this feeling which has enforced the image of the celibate priest". These respondents by saying that the question should be left open stressed the point that priests themselves should have a say in what they feel about the present situation if the dialogue among the People of God has any reality. It is odd, some pointed out, that lay people and higher church authorities take it on themselves to weight the pros and cons from their own perspective without having much idea of the personal feelings of the priests. The celibacy question has become an institutionalised object to be appropriated by conflicting group-interests within the Church. In addition, sharing with the main body of respondents a disbelief in the sacred character of the priesthood conferred in ordination, they were of the opinion that the crisis of priestly celibacy would resolve itself when more and more people move away from the magical conception. "You know", one of this group said, "vox populi is vox Dei. If so many priests do not find celibacy relevant and helpful in their ministry, this may equally be interpreted as a sign from above".

Attitudes to women being ordained to the priesthood

Probing yet further the role of the priest and his place in the community it was essential to ask the group what they thought of the possibility of women being raised to the priesthood and of taking a share in the moral and liturgical community. So we asked: are you in favour of women being ordained as priests? 68% were against it; 15% in favour and 17% were unsure. The question did not, contrary to expectations, rouse heated responses and showed a certain amount of lukewarmness in the replies. From the institutional side, a shift in the traditional outlook on the place of women was heralded by Pope John XXIII when he declared: "woman is taking her place in public life and ... is becoming more and more conscious of her human dignity. She will, therefore, no longer be regarded as a soulless being or tool, but is demanding

the full rights of a human person, both in the family and society".[1] The majority showed little enthusiasm for the idea on several grounds, the chief being that neither the Church with its present male personnel nearly all geared to the old conception of womanhood, nor Catholics in general were ripe for such a revolutionary step. Pre-occupation with the status of women in the Church was, according to them, the result of the backwash of publicity given to it by outside movements among which the womens-liberation front was signalled out as one of the most powerful catalysts. Although these respondents did not mention that there are intrinsic reasons for refusing ordination from a theological perspective, they appeared to be reluctant emotionally to see a woman celebrating Mass, although they did not think that subsidiary functions were incompatible with this liturgical duty. Women already read the lessons during Mass. One common theme ran through these answers. This theme was the generalisation

---

1. Pope John XXIII in Peace on Earth, 1963, para.41,43. Several of the conciliar documents include passages which show a new awareness of women as full members of the community. This issue since then has gained momentum in Catholic circles, in view of the fact that the Anglican Community in America and this country has taken up seriously the possibility of ordaining women to the priesthood. This possibility became fact when Rev. Alison Palmer, the first ordained woman (1976) celebrated publicly the Anglican service of holy communion in Britain in a Unitarian Church in Golders Green, though she was ordained in the United States (The Guardian, February 17th, 1977). Catholic literature on this point is still growing. The first public discussion of this topic is contained in the Report of the Pastoral Council of the Dutch Province of the Church, January 1970, p.330, where it stated: "It is advisable that as soon as possible women should be further admitted to all ecclesiastical tasks... and their being able to fulfil all ecclesiastical functions, nor excluding presiding over the Eucharist". But this recommendation was made by a national Hierarchy and found no acceptance in England at the time. See on this, E. Gossmann, Women as Priests? in Concilium, Vol.4, 1968, pp. 59-64. Also, The Place of Woman in Liturgical Functions in Concilium,Vol.2, 1972, pp. 68-81. Also Women Priests - Anglican Developments in The Tablet, 11 Dec., 1976, p. 1194.

of a cultural time lag between a very old tradition and the new stirrings of collective awareness of the changing relationship of men and women permeating the whole of modern society. Some short replies are quoted here to throw light on this attitude. A female respondent (28): "Just imagine what a woman priest would be - a hybrid! And that in a male-dominated society like ours, never mind what women-libbers think and try to do". A male respondent (32): "Are these women priests to be celibates or married women? The mere thought makes you boggle and adds more confusion to the already vanishing boundaries between the sexes." A female respondent (56): "The Church reflects the culture of the West. I do not see how she can just jump across the time-barrier without getting rid of the whole weight of tradition and the Scriptures". A male respondent (58): "No, it is the wrong focus altogether. Christ chose as his leaders men, though women were in his company and took an active part in his fellowship". And so forth.

Those in favour while being aware of the objections mentioned, saw a real possibility in women becoming church leaders and performers of the liturgy in the foreseeable future. "It is not just a question", one thoughtful respondent said, "of swapping roles in the running of a household, but the actual change in the status of women in society today. Representative replies ran as follows: One female respondent (27) said: "We call a priest a 'Father' because he is the giver of spiritual life, but a woman is much closer to giving life than a male is. Women are so much better at human relationsh ips; they are concrete, less abstract. Nuns could do so much better if they were to act as priests or ordained women". Another female respondent (37): "Women are no longer seen just as child producers, they have become free to use their energies and talents for the good of all". A male respondent (59): "Nobody questions the competence of female doctors, lawyers, politicians etc. Why think that a woman cannot be a good priest as competent in her job as in the other professions?". Another female respondent (40): "Sheer arrogance on the part of males in our society; it is time that the balloon is pricked".

Those who were unsure remarked, on the whole, that the issue is beset with ambiguities of which it is not possible to make head or tail. In conclusion the fact that women have already achieved social emancipation in spite of, rather than thanks to the Church, was generally thought not to constitute a clear argument for the admission of women to the priesthood.

Attitudes to some specific moral issues

Having described the group's attitudes on what the Church as a moral community meant to them, it was essential to elicit their views on some of the basic moral issues which are still thought to differentiate between Catholics and non-Catholics. Such issues include birth control, abortion and divorce. The answers to such questions will enable us to penetrate a little further into the collective image of the Church as a source of morality for contemporary Roman Catholics. Besides, these replies will help us to understand a little better the problems and the tensions experienced in the domain of values.

The question asked was: What is your attitude to birth-control? Before presenting the findings, it is important to state that when Catholics speak of birth control they have not only in mind the issue as such, but the whole question of the moral authority of the church as involved in the relevant encyclical, Humane Vitae. The encyclical on birth control is, therefore, an important watershed in the transformation of the sacrality of authority. Although the encyclical had not been published under the formal lable of 'infallible', the ensuing uncertainty of what assent is expected and required produced for a good many doubts and misgivings about what constitutes the proper sphere of the teaching authority of the Church, particularly when it became known that the Pope went against the advice of the bishops and his consultors who served on a consultative body. The collegial process was in this case disregarded by the Pope.[1.]

1. Dr.John Marshall,an English neurologist, who was one of the original six members of Pope John's Commission(1962) to act as advisors on this question,gives an account of the embarrassment of theologians and lay experts alike when theologians on the Commission admitted that they could not show the intrinsic evil of contraception on the basis of 'natural law'. (The Times, 3rd August, 1968)

This background helps us to see the general ramifications resulting from the encyclical as well as its impact on the minds of Catholics. The positions taken by the respondents were as follows: 78% answered without hesitation that artificial birth control is a matter for the conscience of individual couples. 10% said that they favoured the papal ruling, but that its interpretation should depend on further advances made in theology, medicine and allied disciplines dealing with human sexuality. 12% declared reservation and qualification. Only a few believed that the practice of birth control by Catholics was a serious obstacle to salvation and that the faith could be lost as a result.[2] The theme underlying the majority of replies was set by a married couple (early 30s) when they said: "An old hat now for my age group and below. The Pope's letter has already slipped into oblivion". There was no evidence that the respondents had read the encyclical or were even interested in the controversies which followed in its wake. The majority thought that birth control and family planning was a private decision on the part of married people. "You know", a comment was, "there are already too many people on this globe. The old mythology of inhabiting the world had a point when people were dependent on their children in their old age in the absence of moder social securities". The main concern appeared to be twofold: practical considerations on the one hand and the principle of moral responsibility on the other. The shift was in favour of personal, moral responsibility.

---

2. It is only fair to point out that Pope Paul nowhere in his encyclical refers to damnation as the penalty for disobeying his command. Only once does he mention 'sin', and then in a pastoral way which is in striking contrast to Pius XI's encyclical on Christian marriage (Casti Connubii) published in 1930. See, The Pope, the Pill and the People, with the full English text of the Pope's encyclical, and English reactions (with some reference to Liverpool Catholics), IPC News Papers Ltd., Cox & Wyman, 1968, London, p.16. Also, The Agonizing Choice by Norman St. John Stevas, Eyre & Spottiswoods, London, and Indianana University Press, Bloomington, 1971.
One other important point should be noted in connection with birth control. The Constitution On the Church in the Modern World conceded that marriage "is not instituted solely for procreation", that the married have to fulfil their procreative tasks "with human and Christian responsibility", and that they are "co-operators with the love of God... and the interpreters of that love" (art.50). This obviously grants to married people free choice of the interpretation of this love, but the text stated clearly that the judgement on the spacing and number of children should 'ultimately' depend on the parents themselves (art.50). True, the Constitution regards children as the "supreme gift of marriage", but it adds that "other purposes of matrimony" are of no less account. But Humanae Vitae overruled these recommendations.

Those opposing the ruling on birth control remarked on the irony of the post-conciliar situation. Whereas the Council intended to transfer some of its moral authority to the people, the encyclical modified this intention and in doing so aggravated the conflict between the teaching authority of the Church and ordinary people. Even those who accepted the papal ruling believed that its interpretation demands now so many qualifications that its real purpose - an idealised defence of the sacredness of human life - got lost because of the language and concepts in which this message is couched. Those who were unsure gave similar replies, but added that the whole argument though obviously something valuable appeared to them incomprehensible and out of touch with social reality. Some of these respondents said that the 'hemming and hawing' by priests when consulted added to the confusion as to how to read the message. The Pope speaks of 'natural law', but what does this mean when neither priests nor ordinary people can provide evidence for it? "When I hear the word 'natural law' in this context", one male respondent said, "I think of the law of gravity, but there is a vast difference between physical laws in this sense and those connected with human reproduction". The loosening of the traditional close relationship of norms and rules, of 'Faith' and 'morals', emerged as an important theme in the awareness of the replies on birth control. The question nagging in the their minds could be described as follows: Granted that Catholics accept the general principle of the sacredness of human life, why deny them the right to interpret this principle according to their conscience? The awareness of this problem was, of course, not posed this way in the replies, but became evident in their use of analogies for describing their feelings. One illustration is given here to underscore this point: "Everybody accepts the value of the highway code in keeping order and to respect the lives of motorists and pedestrians. But nobody is going to worry if the Government changes the code as long as reasons are given". This analogy expressed an awareness that there is not really a quarrel with the Pope's decision in providing a norm or ideal for sexual behaviour since this is his job to do but only with the way in which the rules are to be applied. Priests know the difficulty of imposing on the faithful an obligation when

they have no clear explanation to offer of why what is forbidden is wrong. Durkheim's observation that 'Men cannot celebrate ceremonies for which they see no reason nor .. accept a faith for which they see no reason"[3] has some application here.

While the respondents interpreted the pros and cons of birth control freely, their attitude to abortion showed an overwhelming rejection of its practice. On being asked, Are you in favour of abortion? 90% condemned abortion as 'intrinsically evil' and being incompatible with Catholic values while 10% said that they were unsure and pleaded for a change in traditional attitudes to it. The majority thought that as a general principle once you have produced life by the physical act of intercourse you have no right to exterminate it and deprive the unborn child of life. They dismissed the old concern with determining at what precise moment the foetus can be said to be human as irrelevant and as an example of hair-splitting. Yet in the same breath three exceptions were generally quoted: a girl being raped against her consent, the survival of the mother when the foetus endangers her life, and the psychological state of the people involved in the act of intercourse. Surprisingly, hardly anybody mentioned the choice of the baby's survival above the mother's in the case of critical deliveries - a sore point in Catholic moral theology[4] - as meriting special comment. Abortion on medical

---

3. The Elementary Forms, p. 430.
There is little empirical evidence in this country of how the ordinary priests define their position vis-à-vis the controversial encyclical. But the American sociologist, Andrew Greeley, making use of a survey of over 5,000 Roman Catholic priests conducted by the National Opinion Research Center in 1973 states that there has been a dramatic change in birth control attitudes among the clergy despite the official position. He found a substantial loss of clerical support for the papal ruling on artificial birth control: The Sexual Revolution Among Catholic Clergy in Review of Religious Research, 1973, vol. 14, No.2, pp.93, 95.

4. Humanae Vitae does not mention two extreme cases: the woman who will die if she has another baby, and the family living at the level of great destitution being unable to have another child.

grounds was simply regarded as a medical problem and removed from the jurisdiction of the Church. The final decision - if we restrict ourselves to the three exceptions mentioned - was seen as the joint product of consultation by doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, priests and the people involved. This consultation is not to be motivated by an easy-going permissiveness in order to 'get off the hook'. Most in this group said that abortion was an easy way out and a failure in facing responsibilities. But even among the representatives of this view uncertainties were stated as to where to draw the line. Again, very few specified what they meant by the 'psychological' state of the partners involved in abortion. As could be expected, female respondents felt more strongly about abortion than male respondents; as one female respondent exclaimed in indignation: " It is all very well for males to discuss this with dispassion, but it is the woman who is literally left with the baby".

Those who said that they were unsure repeated the general conviction that one should not tinker with human life for selfish reasons, and that abortion as a social phenomenon should be given the same amount of attention as is given to birth control. It was pointed out that abortion is as much surrounded by cultural taboos, at present in discussion, as birth control was in the past. The latter has now became part of a neutral vocabulary in that it hardly arouses any emotions whereas the former evokes resistance in Catholic sensibilities. As one respondent expressed it: "It is a bit of an anomaly if you compare the emotional weight attached to the two related issues. It is odd to allow people to use moral discretion in the use of contraceptives on the plea that they are responsible and deny them choice in abortion. The dividing line seems a little thin here". Implied in this observation was the recognition that criteria for judging the morality of abortion were susceptible of change depending on the way society in general was moving. Referring to the three exceptions mentioned in the case of abortion, they tended to stress the fact that these three exceptions have acquired an acceptable status in society and among Christians which is as much 'cultural' as the accepted position on birth control. Some mentioned the 1967 Abortion

Act which in principle allows for the removal of the foetus when performed by a registered medical practitioner. This act contains what is called the "conscience clause", whereby no one is forced to any participation in any abortion if he has a conscientious objection to it. The burden of proof is upon the person asserting his right of conscience. The point made by some of the respondents was that the Abortion Bill could not have been passed unless there was a social demand for it reflecting the general transformation of the country's feeling on it. Those who were unsure felt that an urgent re-examination of the whole area of Catholic sexual morality was necessary before such matters were clarified.

Reference was made to the existence of SPUC, an interdenominational society in Formby whose purpose is to defend the right of the unborn to live. In Formby SPUC has a branch with only 100 mememberss, 70 being Catholics drawn from the three Catholic parishes and 30 from the other churches. There is no clergy on the committee, but according to a key informant who took an active part in the founding of the Society, the three Catholic parishes give visible support to the aims of SPUC. Originally, the local branch was composed of members from the different denominations but now, the key informant said, it has become "a Catholic affair". Considering that the Catholic population of Formby is one third of the total population, active participation is very poor. After some initial enthusiasm interest soon petered out. Commenting on this, she said: "It is disappointing to realise how little support we get for our cause. Catholics came to listen to talks, but when it came to action membership dropped. The problem as I see it is that ordinary Catholics are not so well informed as is generally supposed and seem reluctant to acknowledge that they ought to form a proper judgement simply because they still think that it is the clergy who should be doing the thinking". Furthermore, some Catholic families had planned to take in pregnant girls to prevent abortion since the stigma of illegitimacy has diminished, but the response so far has come to very little.

Attitudes to divorce and remarriage

The loosening of the sacred bonds embodied in the traditional doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage was shown, to some extent, in replies to the question: What is your attitude to the possibility of divorce and remarriage? 51% were in favour of some change in the traditional doctrine on divorce and remarriage for Catholics, 29% did not think that a change was desirable, and 20% said that they were not sure. To begin with those who recommended a change: their main line of argument derived its force from the fact that the primary and sole aim of marriage is no longer the pro-creation of children so that the survival of the institution is becoming increasingly dependent on the compatibility of the married partners. Incompatibility was frequently mentioned as a legitimate ground for separation, for divorce and for remarriage especially in the case of young couples who have no children, but less so for couples who have children already. What became apparent from these replies was a consensus on the disconnection between marriage and its sacramental character. Like all sacraments, marriage in the Catholic perspective is a sign producing what it signifies: the indissoluble union of two partners. This sign in its turn serves as a symbol of the mystical union between Christ and the Church conceived as 'the bride of Christ'. Behind this formulation stands, of course, a cosmological view of reality in which marriage is one of the nodal points. It implies that in some ways the end of marriage is not mutual comfort or even procreation, but the salvation to be found in it as was the case in primitive society where sexaulity and sacrality were fused into a coherent system. Marriage as a human order possesses a sacramental character; it does not merely express the loving union of a man and a woman, but also the loving union of God with mankind in the order of salvation. In other words, the Catholic vision of marriage reflects a sacred conception of the world and echoes a mythical and theological mode of thinking, which, since Vatican II, is breaking down.[1] In order to make

1. See Man and the Sacraments: The Anthropological Substructure in Concilium, January, 1968, pp.18-26. A survey of Catholic periodicals on the tangled problems of indissolubility of marriage is given in The Furrow, April, 1973, pp.214-224, but this survey deals with the problem only from a theological perspective.

sense of the respondents' reactions one must have in mind the conciliar documents. The conciliar documents and subsequent debates on marriage indicate a shift away from a strictly legal view to that in which personal relationship is stressed and it is acknowledged that marriage has purposes other than those of procreation. These indications at least imply that sexual intercourse within marriage ought to be seen as having as one of its primary purposes the fostering of the inter-personal wholeness of both partners. In terms of value, the social and psychological dimensions appear to come first in married partners, and the biological dimension is losing some of its autonomy.

contraception Of universal significance is man's increasing control over fertilization. Such a control over the moment of fertilization is likely in the long run to be more important than population control whatever happens to the latter.

In reporting the views on birth control, this fact of control was found to be accepted as a given and dissociated from salvation. Only a few respondents believed that birth control is an obstacle to salvation. While the present debate on the possibility of divorce and remarriage carries many references to the symbolic referents of the Christian idea of marriage, it is certainly the case that both secular and ecumenical factors play an important part in the changing conceptions of marriage. First, it should be noted that from 1937-1970 there were three main grounds for divorce in this country under the 1937 Matrimonial Causes Act - cruelty, desertion and adultery. The Divorce Reform Act of 1969 allows separation also as a ground for divorce. Since January 1971 the sole ground for divorce is now irretrievable breakdown (however irretrievability is interpreted). The important underlying factor in this change is a view of marriage which shifts away from the strictly contractual basis in which partners have rights and obligations to a personal relationship whose integrity and continuation is seen to depend much more on the creative capacity of the spouses to meet each other's potential as individuals. As became evident in the previous discussion on birth control and abortion, the respondents were well aware of the cultural premises underlying contemporary values at work in social legislation. The move away from

contractuality to a more personalistic view of marriage and divorce is happening in spite of the Churches, no matter to what extent they are still able to influence legislation in this country as the Anglican Church is still part of the Establishment.

Another point to be reckoned with is the ecumenical climate in which the Churches are trying to find what they have in common and where they differ.[2] We have already observed the dilemmas engendered by this situation while exploring respondents' attitudes to ecumenism and the ministry. Without going into further detail, the ecumenical dialogue has raised, together with cultural reassessments stemming from the wider society, a number of perplexing problems in the field of Christian marriage. Particularly for Catholics reared in the sacramental and symbolic tradition these problems are of great significance and need to be stressed.[3]

---

2. See for example, Marriage, Divorce and the Church, Report of the Church of England Marriage Commission, London, 1972, in which an honest attempt is made to disentagle general Christian insights into the meaning of marriage from denominational ideas, including those of the Anglican Church. Worth quoting alongside it is Mgr. Stephen J. Kelleher's book Divorce and Remarriage for Catholics?, Doubleday, New York, 1973, Kelleher has worked on marriage tribunals in New York and was appointed to the Pontifical Commission for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law. His views did not win approval as John C. Barry reported in The Clergy Review, August, 1974, p.508. Mgr. Kelleher was dropped from the Commission probably because he argued that since marriage is a relationship of love on a personal basis, the absence of love is a sufficient ground for dissolving a marriage.

3. Regarding the Catholic perspective in transformation since Vatican II, several points merit attention. There is, first, the current debate on how Catholic marriage is a sacrament and a sign by itself. The olf canonical law (under revision) stated that every canonically valid marriage between two baptised persons is a sacrament, even if those persons are in no way influenced by their baptism or practice their religion. But if there is no active religious faith, how can we talk about a sacrament? Secondly, what is meant by consummation? The old view saw consummation in too narrowly physical terms and ignored the new emphasis on the personal dimension. Thirdly, what is meant by consent? Consent in the old view was to the use of the body. But what does this mean in the present context when the sacrality of the human body is perceived in secular terms and categories?

As in the case of findings on birth control and abortion, the selective process in defining one's view on divorce appeared to follow the same course reflecting a mixed bag of motivations. Let us return to the main group (51%) ventured the opinion that a change in ecclesiastical legislation in this area is urgently called for. While justifying a couples' decision to separate and remarry when their marriage has broken down, they tended to restrict the 'second chance' to childless couples without giving indications for this restriction except of the ground "that it is somehow not right to abandon children to fend for themselves". This restriction showed in a curious way a deep-seated Catholic bias which is alien to the trend of placing exclusive emphasis on conjugal fulfilment. The parental duties of sustaining children psychologically, socially and spiritually were considered as essential.

Awareness of this ambiguity came to the surface only in a four replies when related to the restriction posed by the respondents of this group. If suffices to quote on example. A middle-aged couple said: "It is difficult to see how newly weds when they have children to seek to dissolve their marriage vows on the plea that their personal relationship has broken down when the spiritual welfare of the children is of more importance than their biological and physical needs. It is again the question of how the balance is tipped. To claim for yourself the right of decision may on this count ignore the personal rights of the children dependent on parental affection". As was pointed out, respondents did not pursue this topic any further. Apart from this rare comment, justification for divorce developed on two fronts, the first being the decreasing control of religion over marriage, the second one, being that of the changed conditions of suburban life.

As to the first, the consensus was that religion has lost its influence in the institution of marriage seen as a divine institution. What was meant by this came out in the general observation that the young generation cannot or is unwilling to avail itself of the religious props and controls over their marital affairs simply because the Church is not 'with it'. This point was repeated again and again by respondents regardless of their age or sex. One or two long comments are necessary to illustrate this point of view. A middle aged couple reflecting on "how it was like in their days" said: "Marriage for us is what the Church taught us, a sacramental union until death do us part. The young couples today have to fall back on their own resources and lack the religious constraints imposed on us. Their world is different from ours. Gone are the days when the priest could raise his finger in admonition and lay down the law". A couple (in their 30s): "Religious values are important in marriage but how to integrate them? Catholic morality has not come up with anything worthwhile for married people of our generation when in trouble. The Church is still debating the legality of marriage and related problems in the sphere of mixed marriages, but no solace is to be found in them when you are coping with the problems of changes in personality and the many needs which spring from them". Or consider the remark of a young girl (19): "I am not married yet, but for me sharing with a boy experiences is all important on a basis of mutual respect and understanding. What if during marriage this ideal does not work? I do not see how the Church can deal with that. Institutions have no time for emotions. If they do, they would not survive". Frequent mention was made of changed conditions in suburban living. Sociologists have made much of the distinction between the 'nuclear' and 'extended' family, the former seen as isolated, liable to mobility, with little support from the surrounding community, the latter as a more emotionally integrated system in which various relatives live in close proximity to each other and where intimacy and interaction between the members are seen as the very stuff of 'real' community life. Some of these differences have been exaggerated in that the telephone and the car are extensions of physical closeness. It was

found in our survey that the people interviewed take the telephone and car for granted for the purpose of exchanging messages and communication with parents in-laws, relatives and friends.

In describing the social structure of the parish community, doubt was thrown on the claim by some urban sociologists that the family within the suburb demonstrates a new form of life which is not found in either rural or urban areas. The nuclear family, according to this view, experiences a reduction in frequency of contact with members of its extended kin. But the undoubted fact of increased geographical distance does not necessarily mean in our view that this has produced an essential change in the structure of the nuclear family, granted that spouses are more likely to fall back on joint couple activities in the absence of physical proximity to their kin. What is more important to note in the line of inquiry is that both types of families in industrial complex societies have witnessed an increase in the average expectation of life which has been extended some twenty years or more since the turn of the century. This has increased the period of marriage which may be as much as fifty years. Furthermore, this increased period of marriage is no longer fortified by the presence of children when the average age of marriage has been dropping. Apart from this, the reduction of infant mortality and the availability of the pill has meant that the average family size is much smaller and that the wife has much more time for other activities as well.[4] Though Formby has a high fertility rate, it was found that Catholic families living in the housing estate who had contracted marriage at a relative young age, before they changed residence, had three or four children. All these external and internal changes focus attention on the husband-wife relationship. The perception of this relationship in connection with the above observations was clearly visible in the many comments made by this group. Two themes seemed to gain preponderance, one concerning the traditional pattern of marriage and family life, the other the changed quality of personal relationship between spouses. As to the first concern, half of the respondents were of the opinion

4. For a survey of British and American studies on this theme, see David Thorns, Suburbia, Paladin, 1973, especially ch. 7 'The suburb and the family, pp. 111-125.

that the traditional role of the husband as the head and centre of moral authority with the wife as the emotional fulcrum is a thing of the past. Surprisingly, even those respondents in the age category of 50 and over recognised that two patterns of marriage exist side-by-side in a variety of admixtures and that for this reason the old ideal of husband-wife relationship is subject to external and internal pressures. The housing-estate Catholics were generally regarded by them as falling into line with the modern picture of the spouses being co-equals in responsibility, whereas there are still plenty of old fashioned families in which the husband is the big boss and the provider. This was primarily seen as a diminishing divide between the two types as time goes on. This situation puts the traditional concept of marriage 'on the spot' since male authority has been so much part of the ethos of contractual marriage. It is worthwhile pointing out that whereas in the old nuptial Mass there was only one ring, by which the husband bound his wife to fidelity; in the new rite of marriage each gives the other a ring symbolising the shift in conjugal relationship. The symbolic exchange of rings in the new rite of marriage reflects the Church's new understanding of Christian marriage. "Marriage is now, one wife said, a democratic affair. I wonder what St. Paul would have to say on it if he were to come round the corner". This being the case, it puts the question of divorce into a new perspective. What if this democracy does not work? The contemporary emphasis on the personal relationship between the husband and wife gives at once rise to many questions concerning the meaning of 'indissolubility'. A third of the respondents saw this as a very difficult knot to unravel. Who, it was asked, is giving criteria for deciding that a personal relationship is beyond repair? This doubt was expressed in several ways, but its main force appeared to be centred on the question of how 'personal' should be interpreted. One relevant example of this doubt is given here. A couple married for many years with married children reflecting on the new change said: "It is all very well to have this lark of self-realization and fulfilment in marriage, but where is the border line between selfishness and real personal inadequacy in the relationship? We suspect that motives for separation are nicely dressed up in jargon to get

away from the old Adam living in each of us". As to the second theme, the changed quality of personal relationship between spouses, the representatives of this group showed caution though, as was said, they were in sympathy with the plight of newly weds and their teething troubles.

Let us now give attention to those who oppose a change in established conventions. While accepting many of the arguments used by the main group, they put a different colour on their evaluation of the present debate. The line of approach adopted amounted to saying that for them divorce is a serious inroad on this institution of marriage in general. As could be expected, opponents were mainly found amount the traditionalists in the community who regard Church innovation with suspicion. As noted before, this type of conservatism was not merely restricted to the old generation but was found among respondents of different age and social experience. The main objection to divorce followed a recognisable pattern in their answers. A typical answer was: "Either marriage is for keeps or it isn't. Once you start opening up loop holes, the whole idea of marriage as a sacred union made before God loses all meaning and you might as well take civil marriage as the model of what marriage should be". They attacked the idea that marriage is a kind of sharing responsibilities on an equal basis and cited the Church as mirroring an ideal of marriage which denies today's acceptable standards of 'doing your own thing' with stress on the autonomy of the individual regardless of the community. They referred to the rising rate of inter-faith marriages encouraged by the ecumenical dialogue attempting to obliterate the real differences of the major denominations on marriage. If divorce is a cultural phenomenon, it may equally be argued that its manifestation is indicative of the general condition of religious faith. The dialogue among Christians has raised even the question of what is specifically sacramental in Christian marriage. "For us", a couple said, "marriage is a sign of our belief in the mystery of Christ and the Church. Tampering with it opens the gates to secular ideas as transient as those that went before them. It is like the Mass being popularised and adapted to whims and fancies."
Thus for them a change of symbolice form

does entail a change of symbolic function, or to put it another way, changing the material form of the sign automatically implies a change in the symbolic referent. Lastly, those who were reluctant to commit themselves either way, were caught between two positions, each of them being plausible with varying degrees of appeal. All the arguments mentioned by the previous groups were endorsed, but there appeared to be little real assent to either of them. The issues involved were thought to be too confusing and complex. Those who were unsure repeated more or less the same points as the rest of the respondents. Pros and cons accordingly moved on the same lines on the topics of marriage and divorce except that for them there is no way of clinching arguments and motivations satisfactorily. The old symbols of contractual and sacramental marriage are getting thin at their edges and absorb new meanings coming from the outside. Young spouses are not only involved in a plurality of social roles imposed on them by their work and social milieu in which they happen to be engaged, but also in making sense of the meaning of selfhood in the performance of these roles. "It is not just a question of swapping roles", one respondent remarked, "in the management of the family, but of what this means in the long run at a deeper level of the man-woman relationship". Contractual marriage has produced over a long period a set of fixed obligations and symbolic expressions regarding marital fidelity and the exchange of duties which are somehow increasingly emptied of meaning and purpose. The values, for example, associated with women in this perspective made the female into a potent symbol of a social and sacred hierarchy symbolised by the cult of the Virgin Mary in the Church. The Catholic conception of marriage has been given a fixed meaning, but any symbolic configuration is by its very nature ambivalent: it always alludes to realities which are not covered by the symbols themselves. If they did, they would lose their efficacy and power of persuasion. Much of this oscillation became visible in the replies of the uncommitted. Their main point was that neither the Church nor secular society is able to provide a code for moral behaviour, each being wrapped up in its own fabrications. This came out strongly in their assessment of modern marriage and the changing image of selfhood. One long comment cited here

was given by a woman (30) when she, in describing her experience in this respect said: "The Church gave us a valuable mystique of marriage and partnership. Now who believes in the mystique of sex? What is the alternative view? There is very little in it because the mass media tell you nothing about this mystical inside and give you instead an image of womanhood which has no bearing whatsoever on the realities of ordinary living". Similar ideas were expressed by this group reflecting the confusion of boundaries between the traditional roles in the man-woman relationship in modern societies.

Some of these confusions extend to perceived anomalies in present day ecclesiastical legislation. One, for example, is the relationship of marriage and divorce to the People of God who include the separated brethren as well. Although Protestants do not regard marriage as a sacrament in the way the Catholic Church does, they give it a distinctively Christian significance which bears a close resemblance to the meaning attached by Catholics to the sacramental reality. To this extent, then, the couple share in this reality even if they deny the Catholic idea of marriage. But how can we speak of marriage as a sacrament if there is no faith in Christ and the Church of which the sacrament is a sign? In the case of two baptised persons when marriage breaks down the very sign on which indissolubility is founded has lost its effectiveness and is disconnected from its signifier. An analogous situation with regard to the validity of Anglican orders was already touched upon when respondents' attitudes to ecumenism were reported. It did not escape their notice that the question of intercommunion suffers a set back because of the hesitancy of the Church in facing this problem on a practical level. A further point needs to be noted which found expression in the attitudes of the uncommitted. It was observed and taken for granted by all the respondents that mixed marriages are on the increase. Despite recent attempts on the part of Catholics to change the impact of the 'promises' (to bring up the children as Catholics) by shifting them from the non-Catholic to the Catholic partners, the outcome of this shift is ironic when the non-Catholic partner is, for example, a devout Protestant and the Catholic non-practising or irreligious. If we have

to think ecumenically, we have to recognise any marriage between baptised Christians as a Christian marriage but, then, as a result if we are to be consistent, we have to acknowledge the position of other denominations on divorce and remarriage. Such and similar objections were put forward. It is not possible to explore the implications of these views any further but they throw an interesting light on further development in ambiguities perceived by ordinary Catholics.

Attitudes to sin and salvation

Our journey would be unfinished unless some attention was paid to the group's position on sin and salvation. Morality is not just a question of doing right or wrong under the canopy of some overarching principle implied in a cosmology. It also defines the space of the holy or wholeness in terms of the incorporate body in which a person has a place and a position. The sort of sin a person might commit indicates a corresponding offence or inroad against the wholeness of the corporate body. Anthropologically speaking, sinning is a kind of pollution disregarding the fences built in the form of prohibition and taboos meant for preserving the health of the community.[1.]

Now Catholics in the not too distant past were quite familiar with a classificatory system in which types of sin ranging from 'mortal' to 'venial' have acquired over a long period precise locations. The sort of sin you committed indicated also the extent to which you polluted the wholeness and perfection of the corporate body and the effacement of sin could only be

---

1. See Mary Douglas, Purity and Danger, Routledge, 1966, in which the author in her analysis of the 'abomination of Leviticus' demonstrates that, once it is granted that for the Jews 'holiness is exemplified by completeness', it becomes clear that for him the principle of cleanness in animals is that they should conform fully to their own species. Only in this way can the sacred cosmology which mirrors God's holiness be perceived.

effected by a ritual cleansing mediated by the sacrament of confession, especially in the case of mortal sin. It is beyond the scope of this study to go into details how this classification of sin was believed to be connected with salvation, but the main point is that within the code of symbolism employed by the Church and by every other religion, the negative as well as the positive must be contained in some sort of balance. If this point is granted, it follows that the seemingly irrational and magical behaviour in the domain of Catholic conceptions of sin becomes meaningful once its own grammar is understood. Because the question of sin carries semantic loads which would be difficult to analyse, we simply asked the respondents what they felt about the traditional distinction between mortal and venial sin and what sort of meaning they attached to 'sin'. The answers to this question would also help us to understand a little what they meant by salvation. It was already observed that a few moral issues were detached from the context of salvation. For example, the practice of birth control did not merit damnation nor did it block the road to salvation. Responses to the notion of sin did not carry strong convictions. Roughly 80% expressed doubt about this distinction and the remainder, 20% did not give it a thought and dismissed it as a relic from the past. However, there was a general consensus that to speak of 'mortal' sin is a metaphoric way of making vivid what cannot be pinned down so easily. "The picture of mortal sin being a black spot on your soul blotting out your vision of God", one comment ran, "was a way of making intelligible to people the gravity of an offence". Or: "I never understood what a grave offence against God was supposed to mean. To talk about God being offended by our mortal sins and less so by the little sins looks to me like turning God into a super being made in our own fashion along a scale of values which look suspiciously like our own". Though this traditional manner of speaking of sin was rejected, this did not mean that all of it went over board.

Sin was described as something both subjective and objective, something "inside" and "outside" of you. The inside was identified with a psychological

state or level of awareness in that you in certain situations apprehend that you fall short by either omission or commission of a set of norms most of which are man-made and increasingly detached from those transmitted by religion. Sin in such definitions appeared to be closely linked with guilt and shame which manifest that "you have done something wrong". This was expressed in different variants, but the most frequently used categorization was given by a female respondent in her 30s: "I always believed that sin grew like a seed in your soul when you did something wrong, but now I see that feeling sinful depends so much on your psychological make up". But being a sinner or feeling like one was not relegated to the domain of pure subjectivity. There was a clear recognition that the subjective state has some connection with the outside world. It was not believed that sins are figments of mind and of culture in spite of the fact that nobody speaks of sin in the old fashion. "Who mentions today", a very old person exclaimed, "the seven deadly sins?" The linguistic categories have changed but not their underlying referents. What was of significance in these replies was a tendency to de-supernaturalize sin and place it in the mundane cycle of human affairs. This became more evident when respondents were asked whether they believe in the devil. As in the case of finding a suitable label for sin, so the idea of the devil was not dismissed. Few believed in the existence of the devil in a literal sense. Of those who did so scripture and theological arguments were played up with considerable skill. One person made this telling comment: "If you believe in God you must by implication believe in the devil also. You cannot conceive of 'yes' without 'no'". Those who did not have a literal belief mentioned over and over again that the word 'devil' is a label to cover a cargo of connotations. When it came to the crunch, the answers showed that for most the word devil symbolises an impersonal rather than a personal bearer of evil. In other words, the devil was not seen as a supernatural agent who is competing with God in taking possession of the souls of men and drags his victims to damnation. At the same time the consensus was, again, that evil does exist both in man and outside him affecting people and the world in unimaginable ways. Salvation from sin was still regarded as an essential task of the People of God. But this salvation

cannot achieve its goals by magical means. While recognising that sin and salvation have to do with the wholeness of the corporate body and that transgression defines the individual's distance from it, most respondents were either unable or unwilling to identify simply the substance of corporateness with the Church or rather with the new symbolic representation of it engendered by the Church itself. Besides, implied in the stances taken on the many values investigated was a diffuse apperception of the ways in which the physical, sexual and social body is transformed everywhere. All the categories in which this corporate body is perceived do not closely correlate with the categories in which society as a whole is evaluated. This lack of correspondence between ideal and reality within the context of a religious faith constitutes the moral dilemma in the life of the community.

Conclusions

In conclusion, it is pertinent to pick up the main threads running through the findings on the group. First, the evidence from the replies and other data showed a very fragmentated picture of the Church insofar as its authority structure and power of legitimation is concerned. Its reality on the sociological level was perceived as running in opposing directions both at the ideational and practical level. To use an analogy, the Church appeared to the group to present itself as a bifurcated whole, one half struggling to maintain its control of its supernatural nature and function, the other attempting to insert itself in the world. Neither the old image of the Church nor the new one did seem to match the expectations of the group. The resulting ambivalence indicated a tension between the Church as an institution and the Church as the people of God at the local level.

Secondly, evidence has been given to show that some of the symbols were evaluated by the group in their own terms.
Neither the Church nor the parish nor the priest were recognized as the embodiment of sacred authority. Sociologically speaking, the eclipse of

the sacred could not be conceptualised as a one dimensional affair, nor be directly inferred from the data. But one aspect of it became reasonably clear insofar as the relation of the sacred and its magical aspect is concerned. Authority was seen as a whole in terms of instrumentality for pursuing the goals of the parish and not as a value in its own right, drawing its strength and persuasion from a mystical conception. This seems to fit very well with Weber's fundamental insight into the separation of the magical from the rationalization process by which he characterised the development of western society long before the Reformation, but which reached a visible expression in Puritanism. As for the Durkheimian perspective, in which obligation, usefulness and the sacred were combined to give an explanatory model of the moral imperative as a social category, the evidence of this research points to a increasing untying of the sacred from commands and prohibitions. The conception of the "wholly other" did not appear to be a strong element in the respondents' replies.

Also the theory that religion is chiefly concerned with creating identity for individuals and groups could not be substantiated. Little evidence was found for the view put forward by Hans Moll[2] that religion is the sacralising of identity for individuals and groups, given the historical functions of Catholicism in Merseyside.

It can be stated with some confidence that bricolage was at work as a selective process of interpretations of religion by the group. This process could not be seen as something developing on its own but as resulting from the ways in which the group is dialectically related to the social reality of which they are part. The onus of the inquiry lay in showing empirically at what points in the normative order this process lagged behind or ran ahead of the social-historical determination of the Church. The evidence suggests that respondents were in a middle position combining conservatism and modernity in a mild fashion.

---

2. H. Moll, Identity and the Sacred, Blackwell, 1976.

Chapter VI

LITURGY AND THE PEOPLE

"It is therefore of capital importance that the faithful easily understand the sacramental signs..." [1.]

General considerations

In this chapter we will consider the attitudes of the people to the new rite of the Mass in its use in the parish community. This rite holds a central position in the sacramental system as a whole as it did in the one it replaced except that its sign value has been redefined in the ongoing renewal of the liturgy after Vatican II. The 'first' sacrament to be revised in the Catholic ritual system was the Mass or the Eurcharist as it is now commonly called. The Mass in English was introduced into this country in 1964 and by 1970 the formal structure of the revised rite was finally established.[2.] The old Tridentine rite which had prevailed for nearly four hundred years and on which every Catholic had been brought up died without much fuss. The new rite is by now as institutionalised as the one it replaced. Considering the central importance of the new Mass in the restructuring of the public worship of the Church, the inquiry devoted a lot of effort to exploring what this Mass means

---

1. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, art. 59, henceforth CL.

2. In England there has been little liturgical innovation since the closing of the Council. The regulations of the liturgy have been left by and large to individual bishops. In 1971 the hierarchy decided that individual bishops should determine when Communion might be received under both kinds (bread and wine). Permission was also given for women to read prescribed lessons at Mass though the reading of the Gospel is normally done by the priest. Communion is normally received kneeling and on the tongue, but the practice of receiving Communion standing and in the hand is growing in many parishes across the country. There is no official ruling yet on whether approved lay people should distribute Communion. Except in very rare circumstances, non-Catholics cannot receive Communion. Group and House Masses are allowed in approved cases.

to the people, and how their understanding of it relates to and reflects the psychological and social determinants of their suburban way of life. The parish of St. Jerome was founded in 1968, a few years after the new rite made its official entry at a national level. Thus Catholic newcomers on settling in the new housing estate found the liturgy of the Eucharist incorporated as a natural element of the parish from the start. Since the Mass is celebrated in a temporary make shift hall in the absence of a parish church building, outward visible signs of the dramatic passage from the Tridentine to the new rite are less discernible than in the older parishes in Formby in which the austere simplicity of the new rite stands in vivid contrast to its surroundings reminiscent of a rich symbolic past.

Due to the emphasis given by Vatican II on modernising the Mass, it is understandable that related sacraments such as, for example, Baptism and Confirmation dealing with initiation in the Christian way of life have somewhat receded into the background of religious consciousness. The Mass has since Trent enjoyed a privileged position compared to the rest of the sacraments and came gradually to be looked upon as the hub of the ritual in which the six remaining sacraments functioned as spokes. Ask any Catholic what he means by 'liturgy' or simply 'ritual', there is a chance that nine out of ten times he will say 'going to Mass'. The interdependence of these sacramental signs and especially their structural relationship to the Eucharist has suffered a mutation in the consciousness of the vast majority of ordinary Catholics.[3] Without going into details in describing the historical transformation of ritual life in the Christian Churches, it is a fact that in the case of Catholicism private Confession became a dominant practice closely associated with receiving Communion during Mass. This being so, the investigator let the people interviewed air their views on how they saw this interdependence of sacramental signs in the life of the 'eucharistic community'.

---

3. See on this point Cyrille Vogel 'An Alienated Liturgy' in Concilium, Vol. 2, Feb. 1972, pp. 11-25.

The new rite has been in operation for more than a decade. Yet Catholics are staying away from it and have fewer and fewer priests to perform it.[4.]

Much has happened since to the ways in which the revised rite has been accepted and appreciated by Catholics in their different social groupings. Folk Masses are no more news. There is some evidence to show that the proverbial man in the pew is showing to have second thoughts and is going through a period of exhaustion and boredom.[5.] It is more than likely that the new Mass is producing effects on the perceptions and sentiments of the faithful which may turn out to be contrary or beyond the intentions of the Church. The rise of Latin Societies bent on preserving the Tridentine rite in all its splendour is a small indication. Nothing is known, however, about the people who join them and their motivation. During the preliminary investigations some twenty persons representing all walks of life in Formby were sounded. Some of them were active members of inter-parochial activities or had been so in the past. Looking at what they said, the basic issue for them was not: "Is it the same Mass we are having? "but rather "For whom is the new Mass meant?" What emerged from this was a shift of interest away from the Mass as a thing in itself, being enacted as having its own sets of meanings regardless of the needs of the community, to seeing it as a ritual event in which people would participate actively as a eucharistic community. More importantly, underlying these sentiments could be detected a rift between the concept of the Church as "The priesthood of the People of God" and the

---

4. Research by A.E.C.W. Spencer showed that absence from Mass by the early 1970s had taken on massive proportions. The Demography of Catholicism (1975) in The Month (April 1975), p.103.
5. Andrew Greeley speaking of American Catholicism describes how it is going through a period of exhaustion and disenchantment with liturgical reforms. The New Agenda, Doubleday, 1973, N.Y. The apologist, F.J. Sheed, has given a lively account of the bafflement of English Catholics in the face of changes in the Mass in his book Is It The Same Church?, 1968, London, Ch . 5, 'Mass and Eucharist', pp. 89-115.

actual ritual form in which this idea is realised. "It is difficult to see", one of these informants remarked, "how we are the people of God without having a real share in the liturgy of the Church."

It is necessary in this context to recall one of the principal findings of the previous chapter which dealt with respondents' images and attitudes to the authority structure of the Church. While on the one hand the majority favoured a democratization of the Church at parish level insofar as decision making is concerned, on the other, it was felt by most, that lay participation amounted to very little in practical terms. Consultations on parish affairs were restricted to externals, but had little bearing on the management of worship. The idea of the Church as "the people of God" did not find universal acceptance even among those who claimed to be progressives. The bifurcation of the Church into two halves, the one representing the clergy, and the other the lay people, the former invested with sacred power, the latter being recipient of it, persisted strongly in the replies. Remembering the role of the priest in the tradition of Merseyside Catholicism, it is understandable that the traditional image of this bifurcation was strong. Implicit, however, was an awareness that the real confrontation of the Church with the world and with its members, no longer resides in primarily an allegiance to doctrine or to the moral precepts of the Church, but in the ritual dimension. The sacred power of any religion is revealed tangibly in the corporate symbolism of its basic rites. The current movement within the Church to belittle doctrine does not conceal the fact that the rituals and ceremonies of the Church are acts of religious power. The Church leaves no doubt on this point: "..the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all her power flows." (CL, Art. 10.) Now one of the most direct effects of the modernization of Catholic liturgy is the emergence of new roles in the distribution of ritual power. Lay people may participate in the Mass and administration of the sacraments in a limited way (lay readers distributing Communion in certain cases). Another innovation has been the restoration of the diaconate. The

ritual structures and the structures of authority had been closely linked in the Church of the past, and their respective spheres of legitimacy and manipulation were in correspondence, the one confirming the other. This correspondence is visibly broken. One key informant put this very well: "The Church is in an impossible position. She wants to give us something she really cannot give without ceasing to be what she is."

Without running too much ahead of the analysis, it is pertinent at this point to indicate some of the parameters which emerged from the replies of the respondents. One of the parameters concerns the changed relations between priest and people in the enactment of the ritual, the other the corresponding change in the representation of social relations. For a start, the lay people have been allowed to enter the sacred precincts, once tab oed for them, to take a more active part in the Mass (for example, lay people enter the sanctuary to read lessons) whilst the priest has moved forward to the edge of the sanctuary to face the people from behind a simple altar table which is placed as closely as possible to the communion rails at which the people receive Holy Communion. It may be that the communion rail marked off the profane from the sacred. It served as a boundary between the shrine proper containing the high altar raised on a platform at the back of the sanctuary and the place of assembly of the congregation which was below and behind the rails.[6.] This arrangement is still observable in old parish churches which have not been able to accommodate the building to the exigencies of the new Mass. This pictorial representation has, of course, disappeared in the parish hall of St. Jerome's. In brief, the magic circle has been broken. The ritual performers are brought together as closely as possible. The elimination of the boundaries is not merely a matter of convenience; it points to a changed conception of the way the sacrificial Gift is to be shared in terms of communality and communion. This is strikingly symbolised by the fact that

---

6. See Alan W. Watts, Myth and Ritual in Christianity, Beacon Paper Back, 1968, pp. 193-199.

the spatial "up" of the priest who brought "down" the Gift from the high altar to the people "below" has been obliterated to give room for a visible representation of the exchange in a horizontal manner. As we shall see below, this kind of inversion in the redistribution of ritual power produced adverse reactions in the replies of the respondents. As was said earlier in several places in this study, the religious traditions of Liverpool Catholicism of the past were found to be still exerting a strong influence on the attitudes of the Catholics living in the new housing estate.

Due to the fact that in the religious tradition of Liverpool the role of the priest as a social leader was so intimately connected with his sacramental ministry to the extent that both aspects constituted a single collective representation of what he was and stood for, it could be argued historically that the Mass became a symbol of group allegiance in an ethnic setting. A ritual system in its essentials consists in investing some person or oject with mystical power, in order that this person or object may be able to confer life on the recipients. This conferment of life takes on different meanings depending on how 'life' is conceived in a particular region. Power has been variously conceived as the source of fertility, health, wealth, political and social influence, and so forth and the purpose of ritual performance is to establish channels of communion, through which the power of the transempirical world may be made available to the partakers. Seen in this perspective, the Mass became from the mid-half of the 19th century onwards, in the inner city of Liverpool, both an emblem of the sacred and an index of group cohesion for an immigrant community in the midst of a hostile environment. On the one hand, it served to separate the Catholics from the Protestants when sectarian strife raked the fabric of the city, and on the other it was put to the service of the existing social order in the sense that it became the visible rallying point for strengthening the social bonds within the Irish ethnic grouping itself.[7.] The ensuing practice of "house-visiting" by the priest

7. Thomas Burke, Catholic History of Liverpool, Liverpool, 1910.

added a political dimension to the collective sentiment.[8] It is worth pointing out that going to Mass furnished a symbolic correspondence with the social structure of the majority of Irish immigrants huddled together in a clearly defined district almost analogous to tribal divisions on lines of territory and occupation. One of the unique features of 19th century Liverpool history was not merely the genesis of sectarian strife but also the growth of city areas which became associated with denominations. The famous Scotland Road area developed more by historical accident than by design into a community of considerable density and volume characterised by a peculiar devotional and cohesive quality found to a lesser degree in other Irish immigrant settlements in other major British cities.[9] Towards the middle of the century there arose within this enclave a certain relative homogeneity in work and life style resulting from a fusion of economic, social, ethnic and religious elements along a part of the Mersey. It was not only that this enclave comprising the districts north and south of the town centre which came to be known collectively as "little Ireland" contained 42½ per cent of the Catholics in Liverpool round 1871, and more Irish than the towns of Cork, Limerick and Galway put together.[10] But alongside this concentration developed a similarity of occupational structure for the majority of the people living there. For most of the menfolk were either dockers, coalers, scalers, or in other ways employed in the developing industries.

In these circumstances the Mass became a major focus of the religious life in its outward manifestation whether or not individuals made use of it. Moreover, it had to absorb over time different strands of ritual practices associated with different traditions. Each of those traditions represented a way of devotional and sacramental life with roots reaching far back in the past. Whereas the Old English Catholics had preserved the pre-Reformation Mass

---

8. Conor K. Ward, op.cit., p.64.
9. See on this, William D. Shannon, A Geography of Organised Religion in Liverpool, 1965, unpublished thesis, Department of Geography, University of Liverpool.
10. W.D. Shannon, ibid., p. 24.

and had transformed it into a group symbol emphasizing more its English heritage than the Roman liturgy which after the Emancipation entered the scene in the form of the "Italian" mission,[11.] the immigrant community found itself in a somewhat different situation. The overwhelming majority had come from rural Ireland and had been accustomed to practice a religion in which going to Mass was mixed with Celtic folk religion as exemplified in pilgrimages to sacred springs, frequenting the shrines of Irish Saints and so forth. Once they were transplanted to an urban environment and were forced to live in the worst slums of industrial England, they had to do without these religious folkways.[12.] Traditionally, going to Mass was as important an ethnic symbol as celebrating St. Patrick's day and the wearing of shamrock was as much a symbol of Catholicity as of belonging to a persecuted minority in the sea of Protestantism. However, once the archdiocese founded its own seminary of Upholland aiming at recruiting seminarians for the indigenous population, another factor complicated group relationships. The priests coming from Upholland were a breed different from that of their predecessors. Although many were of Irish working class background they had been assimilated during their training into a middle class way of life extolling a "gentlemanly" view of society distinctively English and socially aware of its status.

The type of parish priest replacing gradually the core of Irish priests tended to reflect the expectations of a rising middle class whose members were not over anxious to be reminded of their ethnic origin. It was unavoidable that ritual, especially in the "posh" parishes which were being built away from the shrinking centre of the city had to coalesce with the acquired social positions of the "out-group". The move away from the city into neighbouring suburbs was already taking place halfway through the 19th century. Wealthy Cathlics, too, became part of this general pattern when

---

11. An account of this tradition is given by M. Richards in his book The Liturgy in England, 1966, Geoffrey Chapman, London.
12. G.M. Trevelyan, English Social History, 1944, Longmans, London. Trevelyan writes: "The worst slums in the new urban areas were those inhabited by the immigrant Irish..England's treatment of the Irish peasant was perpetually being avenged over here." p. 476.

they migrated to suburbs like Crosby. It was but a natural outcome of the shifting relation between ritual symbol and social structure, with the emergence of new slots for people to move into that the Mass lost some of its binding power. The worshippers whilst attending the same Mass, as far as its outward shape is concerned, would hardly be willing to consider its prime function as one of representing the sacred power in terms of social and cultural deprivation as it undoubtedly did in the ghetto. This is, of course, not to say that the sign value of the Mass was exhausted by the social functions it served. If we were to follow Durkheim who made ritual a product of collective emotion dependent on the homogeneity of the group, the Mass would have long broken up and have succumbed to the various ideological interests attendant on differentiation within the Roman Catholic Church.[13.]

General attitudes and views on the Mass

This lengthy digression was necessary in order to place some of the parameters discussed in a relevant perspective. Returning to the informants and the people of the sample, it was not too difficult to see how these parameters were transformed in their perceptions and attitudes to the new Mass.

On probing what the informants thought of the inter-relationship of the Mass as a social practice and the parish community, some of the historical elements mentioned entered their views. Here follow some replies.
A male informant who had lived in Liverpool for a number of years before moving to Formby said:

> "I used to go to Mass in ... The old parish had a wonderful atmosphere about it. It was not that you knew everybody, but you felt that you shared the feelings and emotions of the people present at Mass. This feeling has gone. Here we have become anonymous worshippers."

---

13. E.Durkheim & M. Mauss, Primitive Classification (1903), Cohen & West, 1963, p. 86. Affectivity in explaining social facts enters the door here surreptitiously. A superficial look at Christian ritual as it has developed over the ages demonstrates the fact that it is not dependent on emotion. See Lévi-Strauss' rejoinder in Totemism, 1969. Pelican, p. 142.

A male informant actively engaged in interparochial activities, one of which is to welcome newcomers to the new parish, expressed a somewhat different view:

> "Going to Mass should not symbolise all this business of togetherness and groupiness you hear so much about. It reflects a kind of communal insecurity as people seem to be more interested in who goes to Mass with them than in the Mass itself. In St. Jerome's we are trying to get rid of this narrow way of looking at the Mass as our thing."

A native born Formbyite, who all her life had lived in the village, said:

> "When I was a young girl I knew everybody. It was part of the joy of going to Mass on a Sunday to see all your relatives and friends all dressed up for the occasion. Now the old village is gone. All these strangers from nowhere!"

A young girl, who was a committee member of a youth club commenting on what she called an "adult affair" said:

> "I do not know what the old Mass meant to the people except what I heard from my parents, but the new Mass is not a great help for young people; it does not represent our age group enough especially when teenagers do not want to accompany their parents."

The same idea was expressed by a young housewife. Describing her attitude and that of her husband to the question what choice should be left to young children in attending Mass she said:

> "I have still very young children we take along when we go. But they are already asking why they should go with us. I feel that we ought to give them religious foundations. I for one favour house-Masses so that the family can take meaningfully part as a unit."

A very articulate view was given by a key informant who took a very active part in the Organization of the Formby Churches. This person is also a native Formbyite and his family has been nurtured in the atmosphere of traditional Lancashire Catholicism.

By drawing attention to the fact that the housing estate harbours a section of Formby's population in which the rate of geographical mobility is high, with people coming and going, he pointed out that the territorial conception of the parish which underlies St. Jerome's bears little relation to the social convention of Mass attendance. In his view there is a "disjunction between the social and eucharistic community". Whereas the parish community in the housing estate when considered as a social bond is fluid, the Eucharistic community is not since its liturgy is fixed and not open to internal changes. The same holds good for the other two parishes with older traditions. They, too, are saddled with what he called a "frozen structure".

Mass attendance

On being asked how often they attend Mass in their parish or somewhere else, several patterns came out of the answers of the respondents. Roughly 1/5 stated that they did not go at all or very rarely. The rest were divided over regulars and occasionals, the former constituting 57%, the latter 23%. The general attitude, however, converged on separating being a good Catholic from attending Mass, and on taking for granted that choice is part and parcel of the Catholic attitude. Freedom of choice was freely interpreted according to a variety of personal and social criteria deriving their force from the life style of the people involved. Because many families own a car they said that they felt free to go anywhere they chose to go either in Formby or outside it. This attitude was well expressed by a young housewife: 'We shop around on a Sunday to see what religious service suits us best according to family priorities." Another housewife said: "We go all the way to Liverpool because in the parish of .. the priest has a wonderful way of saying Mass for children." Other criteria stated were those of convenience and leisure activities. It might be said that just as for sections of the middle class choice of residence is something taken for granted, so in a sense is choice of religious services. Pahl's description of choice as a way of life among metropolitan commuter villages has some application here. He says: "..Thus we have some people

who are in the city but not of it ----whereas others are of the city but not in it."[1].

Christians have always been urged to be in the world and not of it. Extending Pahl's characterisation, it could be said that the newcomers regard themselves as being in the parish without belonging to it in any real sense. We have already noted when describing parishioners' attitudes to parish activities and organisations that, for the majority, their involvement was found to be virtually non-existent. They saw social activities such as were found to be operating as mere appendages, which have as little to do with religion as the many clubs and organizations in Formby with secular aims. It was stated that when St. Jerome's was established it carved its boundaries across social and ecclesiastical divisions already existing in the town. Some of the families who had been parishioners of the neighbouring parish had been transferred to the new one and turned up in the random sample. As is natural, their loyalties are with the parish of origin. Some of these families said that they continued to go to the old parish in which they had been christened, got married, and had their own children baptised and so on. Because the three Roman Catholic parishes offer similar services in terms of Mass attendance, people avail themselves of them according to their mood, connected with long custom and familiarity. This division of loyalties came out in other ways as well. For example, several families transferred said that they contributed financially both to the old and new parish. Things being equal, the plasticity of the social milieu points to the gradual disappearance of outward restrictions surrounding Mass attendance and the cultural weakening of group cohesion. Looking at the ways in which people go to Mass in the three parishes, it appeared that the ritual symbol is becoming more and more abstract and reflects less and less the cultural boundaries of the Catholic community.

As regards the Sunday obligations which has not been officially abrogated by the Church, the respondents who defined themselves as 'regular'

---

1. Readings in Urban Sociology, ed. R.E. Pahl,1968, Pergamon, p.273. (emphasis Pahl's).

and 'occasional' church-goers were unanimous in saying that it is no longer compulsory for them.[3] Whilst a good many admitted that the force of habit inherited from the past still persists with them and that at times the old fear of committing a grave sin of missing mass 'tugged' at the back of their minds, the majority in both categories veered to the opinion that Mass attendance should be on a voluntary basis. From this view point people should attend not because of a collective duty but because they want to do so out of personal conviction and spiritual involvement. As we have noted before, "doing-your-own-thing" reflecting the trend of self-realization and expression entered the respondents' accounts frequently. For some the collective duty or 'must' regardless of personal motivation was seen as an oddity especially when personal involvement and creativity in other fields of religious behaviour is released from church control. "You cannot expect", a respondent said, "that Catholics will take the duty of attendance on Sundays seriously if priests in general shy away from stressing it and allow for personal responsibility in the fulfilment of this obligation." For others the matter resolved itself into a realization that once a rite as old as the Tridentine Mass is interfered with in a fundamental way it is only natural that people would interpret it as no longer binding to the same extent as the old Mass. A respondent representative of this view said: "You cannot have it both ways: by changing the Mass you indicate that a new attitude is required from the people but at the same time this attitude has to be expressed in the old concept of duty which was built into attendance." For others, again, the obligation signified what some called the 'glory of the Catholic Mass' in which respect for the most precious treasure of the Church became manifest whether or not individuals were nominal or real worshippers.

---

3. The modern weekend situation has affected Mass attendance on Sundays. In many Catholic dioceses in America and Europe the Sunday obligation may be fulfilled by attending services on a Saturday evening. There are drive-in churches on the same basis as the drive-in movies. In Britain there are Sunday evening Masses which provide opportunities for those who have been away for the weekend, or were hindered from attending on Sunday morning. These accommodations cater especially for car owners.

It is clear that there is a dialectical tension in these answers. This tension arises out of the discrepancy between ideal and reality vis-à-vis the relationship of personal involvement and socially regulated ritual behaviour in the new rite. In comparing the Old Mass to the new one, it can be observed, paradoxically, that the private dimension (using your own missal, saying the rosary, lighting a candle before your favourite Saint) has been severely reduced to give way to a tigher collective control. Instead of allowing modern conceptions of individual creativity and awareness to develop within the ritual structure, the new liturgy eliminates to a great extent this private sphere. The conciliar text is quite clear on this point. It says, for example, "Liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations of the Church, which is the sacrament of unity.." (CL art. 26). Whilst the faithful are encouraged that they 'should not be there as strangers or silent spectators.. but should participate knowingly, devoutly, and actively" (CL art. 48), they are not given much time and opportunity for individual participation. It should be remembered, also, that the old public and private devotions which had grown up around the celebration of the Mass have - if not altogether dropped - been subordinated to the central significance of the Eurcharist. One of the basic needs in liturgical reform has been to supplant popular devotions with liturgical piety "since the liturgy .. surpasses any of them" (CL art. 13). These points can be illustrated by observing ritual in action in the parish hall of St. Jerome on an ordinary Sunday. People when entering are given printed leaflets containing the changeable portions of the Mass. These are mainly the public readings from the Old and New Testament. These readings are selected in advance, without reference to the wishes of the lay readers.

It is the priest who reads the gospel with everybody standing up as though on command. The people read from their leaflets and it is rare that you can see someone using his own prayer book. Even the hymns are selected. Both prayers and hymns are said and sung in unison, with automatic sitting down

and standing up at the required times. Individual manifestations of piety are suppressed. Looking at the ritual performance this way, there is no way of learning how people think or feel since everything they say and do seems to be absorbed into a collective action.

Mass attendance in St. Jerome's does not represent the local community any more than that in any parish inside or outside Formby. The fashionable view espoused by theologians that the Sunday Mass is the expression par excellence of the Church as community appears to stem more from ideological positions than from considering what is empirically the case. It is in this connection worthwhile to recall one of the principal findings in the studies of Dr. Ward and Dr. Brothers who, each in their respective areas of research, came to the same conclusion as to the nature and extent of parochial loyalties.[4] It was in their view the Church universal as a corporate body in the abstract that formed the measure and extent of their respondents' attachment to or disaffection from the local parish. What they found was that the correspondence between the parish sytem and the social structure had gone. The invisible unity of the faithful with Christ may be satisfying to a theologian, but not so to a sociologist who is concerned with how a community is put together and how its works. Looking at the social composition of an ordinary congregation in the parish hall of St. Jerome, it is hard to infer that the eucharistic community coincides with the community structure of the congregation.

At best, the people come as individuals and families with or without their children. They occupy the seats as they come without any sign of social discrimination. Men and women, old and young, take their seats wherever their fancy takes them. The worshippers seated do not seem to recognize one another and seem to restrain outward signs of recognition and affection. It is not possible to detect who holds what sort of position in the social hierarchy

---

4. Conor K. Ward, op.cit., p. 115; Joan Brothers, op.cit., 159. It should be pointed out that both researches were undertaken before Vatican II took place. The injunction to see the Church universal as the 'priesthood of the people of God' had not yet impinged on the consciousness of Liverpool Catholics nor on their attitude to Mass as this was the Tridentine Mass with its local colouring

of the community since everybody is fused into a homogeneous mass. Everybody's attention is riveted on the priest who still holds a central position as the chief ritualist. The fact that he has come forward facing the people tells you little about his relation with the people except that he appears no longer to be separated from them as in the days gone by. Nor can much be learned about the social composition of the assembled people by listening to his homily. There are, of course, notices read about events to take place in the parish, but the bidding prayers inserted, dealing with the needs of the universal Church and the local community, are fairly abstract. It is not possible any longer to be stirred by notices about who is getting married or who died when very few people know their neighbours. The homily which again is prescribed according to the calendar of the liturgical year is addressed to the people present, but it tells you little of what sort of problems are of importance in the community except in allusive ways.

The people do not seem to express a feeling of being at home or even of belonging to a concrete grouping. For anthropologists studying ritural behaviour in pre-literate and small scale societies, the religious rite is essentially an expression of corporateness. But how are the Mass attenders incorporated and into what? Roger Grainger asserts that "A rite is a society; and where religion is universally accepted, the rite is the society.."[5].

This idea is hardly applicable to the parish community of St. Jerome. The evidence so far collected shows that the ritual obligation of attendance serves only up to a point as a means of religious self-identification for most of the respondents. It has become clear from what has been said that the meaning of attendance and non-attendance cannot be easily specified. There were some who tended to find the justification for going in their personal history, whereas for others it lies in the present context of their actions and consequences. There is no necessary connection between sharing religious values in terms of the 'invisible community' and that of belonging to a concrete community. The two aspects do not appear to coincide. Going to Mass

---

5. The Language of the Rite, 1974, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, p. 7.

is one thing, but going as a member of a social aggregate quite another. To put it another way, the sort of interaction created during Mass within a highly condensed ritual bears little relation to the sort of inter-action arising between human beings as social agents. "Some theologians have argued", Andrew Greeley[6] observes, "that it is the role of the liturgy to "create community", but such an argument seems to me quite naive. Symbols do not create communities; they rather ratify and reinforce communities which already exist.. The theologians who argue that liturgy ought to create community overlook the extremely important fact that a symbol is not a symbol until it is already shared by a community." Considering the social composition of the parish of St. Jerome representing different forms of cultural Catholicism, Greeley's criticism has some truth in it. The new liturgy of the Mass cannot create community, for its symbolic representation is already shared if its historical continuity is taken into account. The crux of the problem is that there is no correspondence between liturgy and society.

So much then for the parameters underlying Mass attendance. We have looked so far at what the Mass meant to the people as a social institution. Considerations offered by them as to its social significance revealed little of what the Mass meant to them personally. It is now intended to relate the comments and views of the respondents to the theological or mythical level which lies at the heart of any sign and symbol system.

The Meaning of the Mass

Let Durkheim's celebrated analogy of the flag serve as a starting point. Soldiers, he said, do not die for a piece of cloth but for what it stands for in their minds and sentiments. This analogy vividly brings home the point that people are not influenced by the symbols themselves but by what they refer to. It is the symbolic referent which impinges on their behaviour through

---

6. Andrew Greeley, 'Religious Symbolism, Liturgy and Community' in Concilium, Vol.2, No.7, February, 1971, pp. 66-67. The whole article is well worth reading.

the mediation of the visible sign. Religious statements about the Mass have meaning, but it is meaning which has as a referent a metaphysical reality, being part of the code of what such statements are about. However, there is no direct route either to these metaphysical meanings or to their interpretations unless we allow their institutional definitions to speak for themselves as much as possible. This means that if we now wish to penetrate the deep structure of the theological ideas contained in the Mass, we have to learn how the respondents themselves interpret these ideas insofar as they are aware of them. Here Victor Turner [1.] comes to mind who has received much praise for his meticulous care in his analysis of Ndembu ritual by allowing his respondents to offer their own explanations about their ritual customs. However, the case with the analysis of Catholic ritual is infinitely more complex for sociological reasons which must be apparent by now.

It is precisely the question as to how sacramental signs differ from signals and symbols in their interdependence within the ritual life of the Church as a whole which has played such a great part in theological controversies in opposing camps since the Reformation. The fierce battles about how sacraments are effective signs might seem in retrospect to be the product of an arid scholasticism far removed from the ordinary life of the people. But in fact the resolution of these theological issues was incorporated in the liturgical practices as they developed over time in the different denominations regardless of whether the ordinary worshipper was aware of their theological implications or not. The major Christian bodies accept as central to their ritual beliefs the breaking of the Bread designated as the 'Last Supper', 'Holy Communion', or the 'Sacrifice of the Mass'. It is not the ritual act of breaking the Bread and blessing the wine which has been a source of division among Christians, but rather what this act signifies and to what extent its signification has an effect on the participants. One of the interesting developments within the Christian Churches today is the joint effort made by Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist theologians in arriving at agreement on the meaning of the Eucharist and the sacramental ministry which would be acceptable to all

1. Victor Turner, The Ritual Process, 1974, Pelican, p.15.

the Churches concerned.[2.] The purpose behind this ecumenical rapproachement is not merely to accommodate existing practices to outside pressures, but more to open up polarised positions so as to provide the believers with means to learn what this ritual ought to mean for them. Much of what the respondents had to say about the new Mass cannot be understood unless we pay attention to the Catholic position on signs. As the Constitution says: "In the liturgy the sanctification of man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which corresponds to each of these signs" (CL art. 7, emphasis mine). This is, of course, the Catholic position. Whatever authority may say, people can also understand the meaning of a sacrament from what they see in front of them, not only from what they have been told. Nevertheless, whatever they do, they can only do so within the given sign system.

When asked whether they prefer the new Mass to the old one, respondents were at first reluctant to expresss their views. The first replies revealed a neat division. 32% expressed approval, 24% disapproval and 44% abstained from committing themselves either way. But once further probing took place, these neat divisions collapsed. The phrase used most commonly was something like this: "The old magic has gone out of it." Or, "The mystique has evaporated". Or, "it has been demystified". These and similar expressions formed a common theme in the discussion as it unfolded during the interview. It appeared that these expressions popped up right across their initial positions in terms of approval, disapproval or uncertainty. In sociological terms one could say that the initial replies indicated an experience of desacralization which has been central to the sociology of religion in its understanding of what is happening to Christianity in its confrontation with the modern world. When speaking of the Tridentine Mass as it was experienced in the past by Catholics,

---

2. See, for example, The Anglican Roman Catholic Agreement on the Eucharist, 1975, Grove Books, Bramcote Notts. Catholics and Methodists, 1974, Catholic Truth Society: London. Ministry & Ordination: The Statement on the Doctrine of the Ministry agreed by the Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission, Canterbury, 1973, Infoform, Pinner, Middlesex. Modern Roman Catholic Worship: the Mass, 1975, Grove Books, Bramcote Notts.

one must remember that they were accustomed to regard it as the most direct manifestation of the sacred. The material sign (bread and wine) became in fact the thing signified. The sacred became indeed the "Word made flesh" under the appearances of bread and wine in the midst of the congregation. There was nothing symbolic about the insertion of the Divine at the precise moment of consecration when the whole assembly hushed into silence to await the priest's raising of the host and chalice above his head to signify the real presence of the Lord. This moment was presented as magical: the sign expressed what it signified. This is what respondents meant when they commented on what they described as the loss of the mystical, the holy, the mystery and so forth. Some quotations are in order to illustrate this point. First from respondents who accept the new rite. A young couple though approving said: "The new Mass opens up new horizons for all of us. It is intelligible, plain, down to earth, and allows people to take part in what goes on. But it lacks atmosphere. It does not lift you up as the old Mass used to do." Secondly, a frequent remark from those who expressed disapproval. A middle aged couple put it this way: "The whole thing is emptied out, corroded. The old kick has gone out of it. The worst mistake the Church made is to change the Mass." Thirdly, an answer fairly representative of doubt and uncertainty was provided by a couple who had lived most of their lives in Formby: "We like the vernacular and the simplicity of the new Mass. Dead wood has been cut out. It is about time we can attend Mass in English without the Latin mumblings. But there are no silences; everything is rushed, a talky-talky affair. There are no moments of awe as in the old Mass." Some respondents in the three categories offered sarcastic remarks on what they called "a flattening of the service" in terms of sacred space. What they meant is the fact that the parish hall is used for non-religious purposes like providing parishioners with a coffee or a beer on a Saturday night. "How can you expect", an old woman exclaimed, "that people have a respect for the Mass if the very hall is a kind of cafeteria for people to drink and meet their friends!" Although the introduction of the vernacular was welcomed by most, the nostalgia for a sacred language with its appropriate ritual gesture came through very strongly.

Latin has been called the "eighth sacrament" in Catholic ritual and its disappearance has brought about a kind of disenchantment. What was hidden in the use of Latin has become exteriorised. A striking example of this sentiment was given by a key-respondent: "so far as I am concerned you might as well go to a Methodist church. It is all words and hymn singing. At least these people have personal convictions. Our lot is not used to listening to words. They are brought up on the stuff of magical performance." Whilst 80% liked the idea of praying in English, the general impression gained from their replies was that praying during Mass has become a routinized affair and that the presentation of the Word of God is stripped of visual images. It was surprising that over half used the word "pedestrian" in expressing their feelings.

The word "magical" and its equivalents pointed to a deep-seated belief in the efficacious rite that has been so long prevalent in the piety of many Catholics. The theology after Trent produced a model of cause and effect to explain the nature of sacramental activities. The sacraments are not merely visible signs of invisible grace, but they cause or bring about the grace they signify. In its reaction to Protestantism which emphasized the sacraments as signs and played down their causality, it stressed the sacraments as causes of grace and ignored their sign quality. The unity between sign and cause, instead of being regarded as intrinsic, came to be considered as extrinsic. It was believed that if a certain action was performed, and certain formulae pronounced in the right way then grace was automatically conferred on the recipient as long as he made an effort to put himself in the proper dispositions. In consequence, the sacraments, viewed in this mechanistic way, provided grace, conceived as a physical thing, and became pipe-lines to heaven. Like separate pipe-lines, they supply different graces to meet different needs. Mary Douglas,[3.]

3. Mary Douglas, op.cit., 28, 68-70, passim. See also Roger Grainger, op.cit., pp. 33-37, 46 passim.
For a detailed account of modern Catholic ideas on how the Eucharist is conceived as a sign against the background of linguistic and anthropological developments, see E. Schillebeck, The Eucharist, 1968, Sheed and Ward: London.

writing as an anthropologist, apparently endorses this conception of sacramental efficacy in castigating priests and lay people who want to move away from this magical view. For her "sacramental efficacy works internally, magical efficacy works externally." She is insistent in her assessment of orthodoxy on this point by reminding liberal theologians of the doctrine of the Incarnation which as she says is "magical enough in itself, and the even more magical doctrine of the Resurrection and of how its power is channelled through the sacraments." Referring to Pope Paul's Encyclical letter Mysterium Fidei (1965) in which he expresses concern with modern views on the Eucharist belittling the mystery of transubstantiation and explaining the change of the bread and wine into Christ's Body and Blood in terms of 'transignification', she goes on to say: "Here is a doctrine as uncompromising as any West African fetishists that the deity is located in a specific object, place and time and under control of a specific formula."

Changes in the perception of the sacred could be also traced in the respondents' attitudes to Holy Communion. It is today a frequent practice for Catholics to attend Mass and receive Holy Communion. In the past a distinction prevailed between attending and going to Communion, the former covering one's real obligation, the latter being required only at certain times. Hence two clearly distinct representations arose out of this practice. One could participate in the Sacrifice of the Mass without receiving the Body of Christ. And if one wanted to receive the Body of Christ, it was necessary to purify oneself from sin by sacramental confession. When asked whether they thought it desirable to identify Mass attendance and reception of Holy Communion, respondents showed a mixture of feelings along a continuum of seeing Holy Communion as the most potent symbol of the sacred to seeing it as being empty of traditional meanings. 33% were in favour; 13% disapproved and 54% did not know or expressed doubt about the present practice. Those who were in favour of receiving Holy Communion

as an integral part of the Mass were of the opinion that this was a real step forward in restoring to the Mass the idea of the Eucharist being a meal. They said that the old practice of separating Mass from Communion implied a contradiction. This was expressed by a respondent: "Christ told us to take and eat the bread, but not to adore it as we used to do in the old Mass". The symbol of eating together, of partaking of the same food, shows according to some young respondents "an opening up of yourself to others as you do when you eat with friends". Apprehension, however, was voiced by those who felt that the reception of Holy Communion has become automatic and routinized. They did not think that the rush to the table of the Lord was genuine. It has become another 'must'. "You look the odd one out", one respondent remarked, "if you stay put in your pew." The majority deplored the lack of preparation and noted the continuing decline of Confession which formed an essential part of this preparation in the days gone by. The taboos such as fasting have been gradually removed over the last ten years so that the Gift has become easily accessible for all. Curiously enough, a good many saw in the lack of preparation a decline in reverence and respect for the Eucharist. Once, as some remarked, Communion "becomes a free for all", people will lose belief in the real presence of Christ in the host.

A theme for those who disapproved (13%) was that the automatic reception of Holy Communion did not necessarily entail a better appreciation of the Mass itself. Instead of receiving Communion in a moment of private awe, the inverse is taking place: it has become a common property to be consumed by all. Respondents said that the "lack of reverence" in the external behaviour of the communicants indicated a diminishing belief in the real Presence. By this they meant that the more casual and relaxed bodily movement shown by people when they receive Communion did not harmonize with a proper mental attitude in approaching the Lord. Although the majority was of the opinion that the old fear had gone and that it was a good thing for people to attend Mass and receive Holy Communion at the

same time, expressions of uncertainty remained. The conjunction of Mass and Communion fell between two stools in the perceptions of the doubters (54%). On the one hand was the recognition that liturgy as a sacred action should not separate people from their ordinary experience of life, and on the other hand that sacramental worship must retain a core of strangeness. Two quotations are sufficient to illustrate these contrasts. A housewife said: "For me going to Mass has lost a lot of appeal but then the Latin Mass was wrapped up in so much tinsel that you forgot the simplicity of the message which is that God does not want to sit in a tabernacle but to show Himself to us in ordinary living. It is just that we must get used to this new idea of ordinariness". And a very old lady: "I don't think it is good for people to get things so easily. If I look round me and watch people at Mass I see little joy. It looks as if nothing happens to them."

Mention was made of confession and how it used to be associated with receiving Holy Communion. In the not too distant past Catholics were brought up to believe that there was an intrinsic connection between the Mass and the sacrament of Penance. The vast majority took it for granted that penance is the most individualistic of the sacraments, an exclusive private affair between God and the individual. The confession of private sins had little relevance to social consequences. Few at any rate would dare to receive Holy Communion without first obtaining absolution from sin. Like the Mass, confession was looked upon as a magical sacrament. As a sign it effected what it signified: the remission of sin and the washing of the soul. It became the healing-rite par excellence overshadowing the fact the Mass is a sign of forgiveness. Underlying confession was the belief that one could not receive Christ in a state of mortal sin. As a result both rites were taken to operate on the same plane: The Mass in the sphere of collective redemption from sin insofar as the participants were united to Christ as the Sacrificer .

and the Sacrifice, confession in the sphere of individual redemption from sin. Coupled with this practice grew the belief that passive attendance at Mass did not require an act of individual purification whereas partaking of the Body of Christ did.

All the respondents agreed that Confession in the parish and elsewhere is on the decline. Confession is heard at specific hours but few people appear to make use of it. Being asked what they thought of the relationship of Confession and the Mass, the overwhelming majority said that this traditional association should be ended. 40% said that they were in favour of some change in the existing practice; 38% expressed approval of its present form and 22% were not sure what sorts of changes would be desirable. These views referred to private Confession, but they also threw further light on the evaluation of the new Mass. The reasons offered for separating sacramental Confessions from the Mass revolved around the idea that the mechanical way of washing away sins by reciting them in a box before a priest clashed with modern conceptions of individual responsibility. If ritual power is intended to be shared it is in a way to be expected that the participants begin to have doubts about the exclusive role of the priest hitherto enjoyed in Confession. This kind of thought emerged from over half of the replies irrespectively of the stances on Confession. A representative answer given was:"I do not need a priest as a third party. I confess my sins to God." Or: "If we are as a worshipping community at Mass which is already a communal sign of forgiveness and reconciliation, there is no need to go to a priest." Or: "We are praying for forgiveness of sins during Mass? Why have a separate sacrament for something you are already getting?" Respondents in the category of retaining the practice were less sure. They feared that the discontinuation of Confessions indicates a loss of belief in the real Presence. The fact that you were required to be in a state of grace as an individual before taking part in a communal meal and sacrifice showed one's belief that the Holy One was really there.

From 'sign' to 'symbol'

So much then for the descriptions offered and their evaluations. It is necessary at this stage to attempt to penetrate a little further their exegetical structure and discover what elements are linked to the symbols associated with the Mass. Returning to the positions taken by the group as expressed in their replies, it will be helpful to explore each position separately even if this involves repetition. 40% was in favour of retaining sacramental Confession in some form or other as part of the rite. Common to the members was a feeling of apprehension about the falling in disuse of Confession which has always served as a twin-companion in signifying efficacious salvation. Interestingly enough, although they clearly stated that their belief in the efficacy of penance in the absolution from personal sins was on the decline, they thought that its continual decline corrodes the belief in the real presence in the Eucharist. They justified this idea by referring to the taboos and interdictions such as, for example, fasting rules which surrounded the Latin Mass and which in the main have been abolished. The Church has relaxed rules of fasting when evening-Masses were allowed to be said to adjust attendance to the new patterns of work and leisure in industrial society. The present ruling requires of Mass-goers to fast one hour only before taking Communion during Mass. They were of the opinion that the relaxing of these rules had a double effect: it freed the Mass from unnecessary restrictions the usefulness of which belongs to the past but at the same time something valuable went overboard as well. The abstention from food and drink, together with the use of private Confession was not an empty gesture but brought home to Catholics that the Mass was indeed a real Sacrifice each time it was celebrated. One could not approach the table of the Lord without giving something personal in return in order to establish a rapport with the suffering Christ. Commenting on these prohibitions and on the

psychological effects they had on them in evoking feelings of the holy, they were quite convinced that this feeling has departed in their own case. Representative of this type of feeling was the reflection of a respondent: "Once you remove the fences guarding what you consider as holy, people will no longer recognise it let alone respect it." A frequent comment was that the new rite does not make personal demands on Catholics and tends to make them forgetful of sacrifice and self-denial. This sentiment or at least a part of it confirmed a trend observed when we were dealing with respondents' attitudes to morality in the previous chapter. As will be remembered, this trend signalled a shift from an ethic of constraint to an ethic of self-realization. The underlying question, although not voiced, of how this ethic of self-realization can be reconciled with Christian teaching on sacrifice and self-denial could not be tackled.[1].

There were other variations on the same theme as could be expected. But the overall impression gained from the views which focussed specifically on this aspect of the Mass indicated that the sign value of the new rite has been muted. Looking at the responses of those who

---

1. Rudolf Otto's treatment of the sacred, or holy, is worth quoting. He stresses it 'numinous' character and the feeling of awe it arouses in the participants. But he points out the general trend of religion in the West to confuse the idea of the holy with ethical conceptions and to regard it as a correlate of the 'good life'. See The Idea of the Holy, 2nd ed., trans. by J.W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1950).
Worth citing is also the thesis of the American psychologist, Philip Rieff, in his book The Triumph of the Therapeutic (New York, 1968). Rieff proposed that the therapeutic approach to man which has become popular in the wake of Freud's achievement has created among modern man a psychologically-oriented self-understanding which spells danger for culture. Present man, he says, has adopted an ethic of self-realization in regard to his instincts and inclinations. But culture is created through the constraints men impose on these inclinations of the self. He refers to the theological developments taking place in the Christian Churches in the West. Even Christian authors and influential leaders, he says, speak of an ethic of self-realization at the expense of the traditional ethic of self-denial. Ibid., p.16.

welcomed Communion, with certain reservations as being an integral part of the rite, similar reactions were found but with different orientations. The Mass for them is essentially a communicative act, a ritual expression of the people of God assembled together in worship. They were by and large less concerned with the use of the vernacular, the singing of hymns and the recital of prayer. Nonetheless, on further probing, a similar ambivalence came to the fore masking confusion and bewilderment. This can best be illustrated by quoting one or two replies. A young couple while applauding the changes - the priest facing the people; the vernacular instead of Latin; dialogue instead of monologue; the mundaneness of going to Communion, and so forth - remarked: "Well, my wife and I enjoy going to Mass, but something is missing, I cannot put a word to it. The best I can do is to compare my experience of it to seeing suddenly when driving my car the red and green flick on at the same time telling you to stop and go". His wife put it this way: "I like the plainness of the Mass; it is intelligible, but people coming together in church must not be drowned into a pseudo-ordinariness as if nothing extraordinary is happening". We have come across already similar descriptions of how the mysterious is experienced. Here we have to go a bit further by using the above quotation to understand the lop-sidedness of the new rite. The description given by the young couple and many similar ones showed a paradox of the Janus-faced structure of ritual in transformation. It is pertinent at this point to mention one of the most salient features of ritual whose function is to celebrate the sacred in a tangible shape. Students of religion have observed and analysed this Janus-faced structure in that it appears to men as propitious and unpropitious, attractive and repugnant, inviting and uninviting by one and the same token. As Durkheim,[2] following Robertson-Smith

2. Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (1915) George Allen & Unwin, London, 1971, p. 326, p. 382, especially Chapters V and VI, pp. 389-414. See for a detailed discussion of Durkheim's analysis of the ambiguity of the sacred T.O'Dea, Sociology of Religion, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1966, pp. 20 - 21.

has pointed out, the essential characteristic of the sacred is its ambiguity propelling the worshipper in opposite directions.

Thus there is a precarious balance in every rite in maintaining these opposite feelings with respect to what is deemed sacred in a particular religion. This amounts to saying that Catholics should approach the Eucharist with circumspection and awe on the one hand, and on the other to seek it out and consume it without fear. Now the new liturgy rests on the intention of bringing the common and the holy together so that for the faithful there is no longer a sense of stepping out of the world of ordinary life into that of the sacred as though they are separate realities. The whole thrust of liturgical renewal is directed towards accommodating the 'mystery-cult to conceptions of the Church and its embodiment in local communities as the 'sacred community'. Much of the dissatisfaction of Catholics with their Church and especially with the new Mass makes sense if the ambiguity of the sacred is granted. As is known, Durkheim's division of the sacred and the profane into two absolute categories presents akward problems from a sociological point of view. In the case of historical Christianity the doctrine of the Incarnation is precisely the overcoming of the Durkheimian dichotomies since it is belived that the radical distinction between the sacred and the profane has been overcome and resolved in the person and life of Christ. Another caveat must be added. Durkheim was reluctant to include magic and its practice in his treatment of religion. "To be sure", he says," the belief in magic is always more or less general; it is very frequently diffused in large masses of the population, and there are even people where it has many adherents as the real religion. But it does not result in binding together those who adhere to it, nor in uniting them into a group leading a common life. There is no Church of magic."[3] This view does not accord very well with what has been said about the traditional Catholic idea of sacramentality. The fact that theologians,

3. Durkheim, op.cit., p.44. (emphasis mine).

liturgists and the Church itself are trying to wean the people away from seeing the Mass and other sacraments as efficacious means of salvation does not mean that a religious tradition can be done away with overnight to adjust itself to modern conceptions.[4].

Returning to replies of this group, it became apparent that the respondents were bothered by the flattening of the sign of the sacred. It is a beacon for collective sharing of the meal, but not for private appropriation. It is useful to compare the pre-Vatican II Mass to the post-Vatican II in order to bring out more clearly what respondents meant. Whereas in the old Latin Mass there was sufficient leeway for inviduals to satisfy their personal devotions within and alongside a highly formalised structure - there was no incongruity, for example, for people to say the rosary, or to select from their missal prayers they found suitable - in the new Mass such personal creativity has been greatly reduced because public prayer has been given a place of prominence. In terms of the sacred, this means that whereas in the former case individuals could construe meanings of the Mass more freely and generate emotional responses within a formalised setting, in the latter case this form of personal creativity has been reduced. To put it in another way, the contrast between the two types of Mass lies in the way in which the Gift became accessible. The prohibitions and interdictions of the old Mass accentuated the need for personal holiness and made it more difficult to approach the sacred; the abolition of most of these prohibitions demands less of personal holiness and makes it easier to receive the Gift. Over half in this group remarked that the Mass has become a "common denominator" in order to present not so much

---

4. The Constitution on the liturgy displays a kind of ecclesiastical bricolage: It sets out to restate the traditional doctrine of the Eucharist in full force (art.47). Yet while wishing to accommodate the outward structure of the Eucharist to modern requirements insofar as its code is concerned (replacement of Latin, for example), it holds on to a traditional interpretation of the content (message). There is little evidence that the scholastic theory of the ontological status of the sign is modified.

a shared faith as the values of community life. What these values are have been shown when a description was given of the life-style of the middle class community. The professions represented in the parish tend to set their mark on the style of worship. The parish milieu is, of course, at the best of times hardly representative of the overall environment in which Christians have to live their lives; and, since the parish as an institution wants to survive, it makes a judicious use of the available forces of the environment according to ecclesiastical ideology which puts a limit on personal creativity within the culture. Hence the tensions which can exist in the parish between the forces of preservation and those of change must be exorcised so that something acceptable to all can come out of the interaction between the various forces. The self-image of the parish requires that it is reassuring by being always there, being available for everyone regardless of the conflicts and inner tensions whithin the community.

St. Jerome's is no exception and projects in worship the interests of group-life as well as that of the institutional Church. It is in this connection that Durkheim's controversial position on the function of ritual in society is worth restating. He has been criticized for holding that in ritual activities man is but worshipping his own society and for endowing the group with a kind of metaphysical life all of its own. He is perhaps unwittingly closer to a sociological truth than Christians and even sociologists would dare to admit. If we take the Merseyside tradition as our paradigm, from its evolution from an ethnic to an assimilated Church, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the Mass was both a sign and a 'totem' of the ethnic minority in the time of its adversity and deprivation. Where the two met in the process of assimilation is, of course, a different story. In terms of semiology, going to Mass served both as a sign and symbol of group life, the latter symbolising one's sense of belonging, the former converting this sense of belonging into an effective reality controlling the ritual

behaviour of those who belonged to the immigrant community. It is difficult to know when in the suburbanization of Catholicism the sign collapsed into the symbol or how their respective sign functions became inverted. Leaving aside the possible ways in which this symbolic process took place, it is not altogether off the mark to observe the 'common denominator' referred to. What is this a sign of? Listening to the respondents in private and observing outward ritual behaviour, it became apparent to the investigator how the life of worship is more or less in accordance with the unstated values of the middle class community. Everything said and done by the congregation and the officiating priest tends to consolidate an image of acquisition, of self-assuredness, of complacency and dull conformity to what is felt to be proper and befitting general expectations. The outward surface of the service does not speak of conflict and tensions within the community. The sermon is an index. Passing references are made to the general ills in society but rarely to existing conflicts in the bosom of the congregation. The tone of the bidding prayers and of the sermon is, as a rule, ethical rather than prophetic. Many of the respondents mentioned how bored they feel with these prayers and the weekly sermon. There is little of joyfulness to be observed during the service, and the very word 'celebration' is, to say the least, a misnomer when everybody appears to be withdrawn within himself without any outward sign of enjoyment. In addition, the sense of neighbourhood characteristic of close-knit societies is absent. Here we see the socio-cultural transformation of the rite caught, as it were, on the wing: It offers potentialities for transcending traditional or proposed versions advocated by the Church, and yet, it encloses and cramps whatever individuals want to make of it.

Turning our attention to the third group, that is those who abstained from saying what they felt about the fusion of Mass and communion, it was found that by and large the representatives of this group were in many respects at one with the views expressed by the other sub-groups.

Their uncertainty was of a different nature. First, included in this group were the doubters and sceptics about the doctrine of the real Presence. A few of them were explicit enough. One respondent said: "For me, communion is a piece of bread and means nothing whatsoever". Others referring to the anglicization of the rite marked its tendency to become a prayer-service without much to support it in the line of something uplifting. A very young male respondent said: "you may as well go to a Methodist or Quaker service. At least there is silence to commute with God. Our lot falls over in prattle". Secondly, others were reticent. They felt that the endless discussion about what the Mass ought to mean was a useless exercise: For them the rationalization of worship is the death-knell of what cannot be named. Thirdly, others again admitted that it was difficult to get away from the past and to be expected to get on with it without the usual leads. They felt non-plussed and preferred to reserve judgement. An eloquent testimony to this sort of feeling is worth citing in detail. A very young female person said: "What is all the fuss about? I don't care a damn about what my parents or the parish priest want me to believe. For me the Mass is something given to you like a dance in the discotheque. There is something in it you have to obey like the rhythm set by the music. But you are not a slave or a mindless automaton. You can bring into it your own personality and live the moment as something wholly your own".

Our journey into collective representations should sound a note of warning. It should be clear that the positions described and analysed do not represent clear dividing-lines as though the speech community could be cut up like a cake. The main orientations were given prominence not because they were wholly exhaustive of the experience of the people interviewed, b ut because they pointed to what Bowker called the way in which 'route-finding activities' take their course when the traditional vehicles of faith lose their plausibility when confronted with the paradoxes

of religious life within and without.[5]

But the inquiry into the meaning-structures so far described would be incomplete if we were to leave out some other areas of tension connected with the respondents' perceptions of the rite in use. One of these areas concerns the proclamation of the Word, and another the function of public prayer in the context of that proclamation. This refers to the emphasis placed in the new rite on the proclamation of the Word through the mediation of the Scriptures and the sermon. The shift entailed in this emphasis points to a restoration of the proclamation of the Word of God to a central sign-position and shows the resolution of a long drawn-out battle in the respective Catholic and Protestant camps regarding the ontological status of the sacramental sign. If Protestants tended to stress in their worship the presence of the Word in the written and spoken word, Catholics emphasised the sacramental presence of the Word and, as we have seen, attributed to this mode of presence a magical efficacy. These theological differences have become since the Reformation solidified in the respective practices whether or not the people attending the services were aware of them. It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that the present rite embodies at an institutional level the defusion of these ideological oppositions. The Constitution gives a clear indication of this shift. The Mass is both a proclamation and accomplishment, or, more simply, a word and work (art. 6). Furthermore, the term proclamation, and notably its Greek form, kerygma, has been introduced into ordinary language alongside expressions such as those of "eucharistic celebration" and the like. Kerygma has been taken to mean the heralded message (derived from the Greek words keryx (herald) and kerysso (to proclaim, to herald). More importantly, the kerygmatic approach both within and outside the liturgy is not so much a proclamation of dogma but of Christ. The institutional shift apart from signifying an ecumenical awareness on the part of the Church certainly indicates that the sacramental sign has lost the privileged position it had

5. J. Bowker, op.cit., cf. Chapter 4, 5.

hitherto enjoyed in the Tridentine Mass and has entered a partnership with the linguistic sign in the process of communication. In order to provide a context for respondents' reaction to this aspect of the rite, it is useful, once again, to compare the post-Tridentine to the Tridentine Mass.

In brief, in the Tridentine Mass there was a close interdependence of vocal, gestural and symbolic expression. The vocal expression was a form of language use, which involved praying and singing; the gestural expression was a form of body language deriving its power of symbolization from the human body itself, and the symbolic expression was a way of using objects (clothes, light, incense, and so on) endowing them with a referential capacity over and above pure linguistic meaning. The visual substance - physical gestures, postural attitudes, objects, images and iconic representations - did not in this structure signify autonomously but contributed to the amplification of linguistic meanings at every point in the unfolding of the ritual.[6] But in the new Mass apart from having been stripped of the gestural dimension, the proclamation of the Word has become more tied to the culture of the written and spoken word.

---

6. This interdependence of word and action in ritual is discussed by A. Vergote, Symbolic Gestures and Actions in the Liturgy in Concilium, Vol. 2, February 1971. Similar problems are mentioned and analysed in F.W. Dillistone, Traditional Symbols and the Contemporary World, Epworth Press, London 1973. Many of the present controversies over the pros and cons of the Tridentine Mass as well as over whether lay people should receive Holy Communion in the hand, kneeling or standing, may appear trivial, but these concerns arise out of universal categories of symbolising closeness to and distance from the physical body which in its turn is an image of the social body and social relations. The present liturgy is very sober in that it got rid of much of the customary non-verbal elements particularly those related to smells and colours (incense, for example). Dan Sperber, has drawn attention to a much neglected field in the analysis of smells and colours. Think of the fact that many Catholic church buildings in the past smelled of incense, burnt candles, and so on. Such properties belong to a cultural code. They tell us a great deal, Sperber believes, about the cognitive structures underlying a given symbol system. Rethinking Symbolism, Cambridge University Press 1975, pp. 115-119.

Returning to what some of the respondents said about their experience of the Mass, it is precisely this situation which figured so largely in their attitudes to the ambivalence of the sacred. Only a few of them described their feelings by saying that it had become for them a "talking affair", a "Protestant service", and so on. The reaction to the shift described above revolved around the importance given to the public reading from the Scriptures and to the homily or sermon following in its wake. As to the readings from the Scriptures, 90% was reserved and little specific information could be obtained. It is usually the case that the readings include lessons from the Old Testament, the epistles of St. Paul and, of course, from the Gospels. The congregation is seated when the lessons are read from the Old Testament and St. Paul's epistles, but gets on its feet when the priest reads the Gospel. The congregation throughout listens in silence. Some respondents while applauding the new emphasis on the Scriptures expressed their surprise at the fact that lay readers are not called upon to read the Gospel which is the charter for the people of God as a whole.

Normally speaking, it is the priest who reads the Gospel. As a number of respondents put it, this privileged position still smacks of a "belated clericalism". It is worthwhile in this context to return to what has been said earlier in this chapter about the breaking of the magic circle. In the Tridentine Mass the priest used to read the Gospel from the pulpit and to deliver his sermon. Now the Gospel is read from behind the altar table. Its traditional physical location symbolising "the right hand or side" has become an anomaly. This may appear trivial, but every small modification in a cult reflects eventually on the perception of the faith by the faithful, and introduces into this faith a modification corresponding to the modification of the service of worship.[7.]

There was, on the whole, little evidence to show from the replies that the stress on the kerygma was understood or fully appreciated as

7. See on this point Dom G. Dix, The Shape of the Liturgy, Dacre Press, London, 1945.

an advance on the old Mass. The silence of the respondents on this was more telling than what they incidentally said. Reverting to what some of the key-informants had to say on the role of the kerygma and its significance, it became possible to discover one or two constraining elements underlying the attitudes as a whole. To begin with, a female respondent serving on the executive committee of the Mothers' Union recounted her experience with fellow members who were encouraged to read the Scriptures at home and during group-discussions. "It is simply not on the cards", she said, "to break a long tradition of unfamiliarity with the Scriptures among ordinary Catholics who have been brought up to believe that the Holy Scriptures were but secondary in the celebration of the Mass". This view was confirmed independently by a male respondent who had been involved in the "Call-to-the North" movement organized on an interdenominational basis by the Anglican and Roman Catholic communities in the North of England, the purpose of which was to make the Scriptures available to every Christian.

He joined a team of callers whose job it was to visit every Catholic family in Formby and to explain the purpose of the "Call-to-the North" and to leave printed leaflets with them.[8] Though the call to the Scriptures had been advertised in the parishes, response to it was found very poor. Describing his experience of going round, he said that very few Catholics showed a genuine interest even when they were told that Archbishop Beck was one of the signatories of the movement. Some believed that the callers were Jehovah's Witnesses. "It is very hard", he concluded, "to get Catholics to become Scripture readers at home to get spiritual nourishment from them". Similar comments were given by parents who have their children at St. Jerome's Infants' school where Bible-lessons are made attractive for the children according to the instructions of the religious Syllabus of the Archdiocese. "The new focus", as one of the teachers explained, "is on making the children enjoy the Bible stories and on relating them to their own lives. We avoid indoctrination". One

8. See Good News for the North by a Man named Mark, Collins Fontana Books, 1970-71. The translation has been produced by the British and Foreign Bible Society for the Call-to-the North.

parent in describing her attitude to the new method of teaching children how to enjoy the Bible commented: "How things have changed since I was a child. Listening to my little daughter telling me what she has learned from her Bible lessons I am amazed at seeing how the sense of reverence for God's word is totally absent in her talk about the lessons".

Going back to the rite, the proclamation includes more readings from the Old Testament than in the Latin Mass. The readings are, as a rule, selected in advance without the people having a say in the matter. The people at Mass either read the printed leaflets (containing the changeable portions) or just listen when the lessons are being read out. 20 respondents referred to this feature of the Mass as nonsensical. "Why", one lay reader exclaimed, "go through the bother of having leaflets if you can hear what is said?" Another person criticized the arbitrariness of the readings: "They come in all shapes and sizes from everywhere in the Bible, but many of them are new to us. We do not know why they are chosen and what relevance they have to the Gospel". A young person in this connection said: "I thought Christianity is about Christ. But you would think you are in a synagogue with all the stuff about prophets, kings, and things which have happened with the Jewish people".

The lack of appreciation of the kerygmatic approach was further shown by the fact that hardly anybody mentioned the homily or sermon. The new orientations in preaching presupposes that in it the speaker acts less in his own name than as the principal representative of the official assembly of God. It is, furthermore, presupposed that preaching should be relevant to the particular congregation. But in the present changes, the sermon remains perhaps the most precarious part of the liturgy, the one least hedged in by specific directives.

The general impression obtained from incidental remarks showed a kind of boredom. Only very few expressed sympathy for the priest

whose task in preaching is complicated by the fact that the authority of the word, generally speaking, is on the wane because of the competing mass media. Although, as was said, little precise information was obtained on the role of the sermon in the new rite, there were some replies indicative of the respondents' opinions. Here follow some representative quotations. A retired couple: "We go to Mass to receive Holy Communion and not to hear a sermon". A very old lady who all her life has lived in Formby: "In the olden days sermons had grit in them with plenty of fire. Nowadays it looks to me that the priest has to fall over to please the lot in the housing estate. Everything seems wishy-washy". A retired civil servant: "I appreciate the efforts of the Church to bring the Scriptural word back to us, but I feel it is a lost battle when nobody believes any more in the literal truth of the Bible". A commercial traveller: "There is too much competition. Preaching has had its day; it has become a consumers' article. In America they produce Bible stories in comic strips. The old words have lost their gloss".

These remarks when linked with observed ritual behaviour showed a troubled relationship with the language of worship. As was pointed out, the new style of worship has incorporated a synthesis of opposing theological positions on the status and function of sacramental symbolism. What emerged obliquely from the data so far was a sense of bafflement and confusion with respect to the kerygmatic approach.

Attitudes to Prayer

Exploring further this sense of bafflement, it is necessary to locate the other area of tension mentioned earlier. This has got to do with the relationship of worship and prayer. It is instructive to note that the term "Eucharist", meaning a public act of thanksgiving, has by now entered common parlance and is used alongside the familiar word "Mass". The latter does not cover the content of belief as clearly as the former.

The term "Eucharist" is less condensed than the term Mass and refers to joyful celebration and the like. Whatever other meanings are attributed to the word "Eucharist", the intentions of the reforming Church are clear enough. Eucharistic worship according to those intentions is conceived in terms of "us" and not of "me", the individual.

The ecstatic experience of the sacred has been channelled into routinized prayers and does not allow the individual worshipper to do his own thing. As to popular devotions and paraliturgies which accompanied the Tridentine Mass providing a lot of leeway for individualistic forms of piety, the Constitution is determined to get rid of them unless they are found to accord with the Mass which "..surpasses any of them" (art. 13). The Catholic lighting his candle before Our Lady or St. Anthony during Mass is looked upon as an oddity. While recognizing that devotions to Saints - a few of whom have been given their marching orders - still have an honoured place in worship, the Church - at least in the Constitution - made it clear that they should be in harmony with the revised Mass. Even the accounts of the martyrdom of the lives of Saints are to be in tune with "the facts of history" (art.29). On the subject of prayer, it is clear that the spiritual life is not to be confined to participation in the liturgy. "The Christian", we are told, "is assuredly called to pray with his brethren, but he must also enter into his chamber to pray to the Father in secret.." (art.12). The new rite, in fact, includes 'bidding prayers'.

In trying to grasp respondents' views on that part of the rite, it was necessary to take a detour by asking them to state their ideas about private or personal prayer. Though no direct questions were asked on how many times and on which occasions they prayed, over 80% expressed doubt on the traditional role of petitionary prayer in their lives. This doubt took several forms, all of which have to do with the sign value of petition. First, the consensus showed that God is no longer

the one to whom the believer turns to obtain favours. The believer hardly dares to demand to be heard in requests for material goods. "It is a bit childish", one respondent observed, "to treat God as a Santa Claus and to force him to intervene in the course of nature". Another person referring to some devotional practices in the recent past - for example, novenas - said: "A whole world of piety has disappeared without leaving a trace in people's habits. Who believes now that you can manipulate God?" Secondly, the consensus showed, also, that for most respondents petitionary prayer is too selfish and bound up with out-dated views of man. In their view, the image of man being encapsulated in his spiritual self with a unique relationship with God which comes to be actualised in prayer is not credible. As one respondent put it: "I feel that prayer does not enable me to reach a personal God who can no longer be imagined as objectively confronting us in the world". However, recognizing that private prayer is in a state of uncertainty, most of the respondents felt that it ought to be retained and has a place in the life of devotion. References were made to efforts on all sides in the Christian world to create forms of praying which would be more expressive of family and community life than the old traditional prayers. A married couple who showed great interest in modern ways of praying said: "We have our family prayers, but we do not use set formulas. We allow the children to make them up as we go along". Looking at some more of the replies in detail, we can detect some of the shifts in the content of prayer. The analysis does not allow us to explore these ideas any further, but one or two points are brought forward in order to throw more light on the prayer of petition in relation to the Mass.

The ways in which respondents evaluated prayer indicated in oblique ways that its sign-activity is perceived in categories different from the traditional ones which emphasized its ontological connection in biblical and ecclesiastical images. Of those respondents who attempted

to express themselves on the meaning of prayer, some 20% used words derived from the surrounding culture to make their own understanding of it more clear. Most of these words referred to the psychological dimension and included such phrases as prayer being "a form of self-consciousness", "a way to self-acceptance", "a way of recognizing others", and so on. It will be helpful to cite some examples to catch the general drift of the replies.

A married woman of about 30 telling how she tries to teach her children to pray, mentioned the idea of self-consciousness and recognition of others. "For me", she said, "praying has little to do with the traditional God of my youth; it is away from selfish pre-occupations and projects and is related to being conscious of one's own helplessness and that of others". A male respondent in describing his ideas said "Prayer is a cosmic process in which there is no room for a static Divine agent. It makes you aware of personal forces which have no bearing on economic and commercial ones". A young girl: "It is a way of becoming aware of others as persons. You learn to accept yourself". Another person while pointing out that prayer is a healing process because it has got to do with forgiving sins, believed that the time has come to rescue prayer from the lava of words and to restore to it what she called "the moment of silence". Characteristic of these and similar explanations was the idea that prayer is not something one can pontificate about. In the views of the majority, the bidding prayer represents God as the repairer of our social inadequacies. A telling reply is given here for illustrating this point. A male respondent: "it is an odd feeling when everybody is dutifully praying for the usual deliveries from all the bad things mentioned while you know jolly well that nothing is going to happen in any case. It is we who are the culprits". A female respondent: "Songs and prayers of praise are alright as a palliative in a troubled society like ours. It is soothing to a pampered lot to pay lip service to the belief that God

deserves praise for the nice things in life which are denied to other people". The main target for criticism, however, was directed against the formalization of public prayer without giving sufficient room for a plurality of forms of prayer. A female respondent who used to be a Quaker before being converted to Roman Catholicism criticised the Mass on this point: "What attracted me to the Latin Mass was the fact that it allowed you to join the priest in a very individual way. The new Mass has gone too far in rationalising everything to the point of perfection."

Recalling what was said earlier on the changed relationship of word and sacrament, it came as no surprise to the investigator that for Catholics the kerygma produces more difficulties for experiencing the Mass as something meaningful than it was intended to solve. Two points need to be stressed. First, the absence of a vivid image of God renders efficacious prayer a very fragile business.

Whereas in the Latin Mass the Word was portrayed in a condensed symbolic form, in the new rite the efficacy of the Word appears to be drowned in the platitudes of language suited to an abstract community. Secondly, and more importantly, the move away from a strictly sacramental cosmology involves unavoidably the horizontalization of its major signs. This in the long run means that the new Mass is caught in the dilemma between transforming the sacred and retaining it.

The meaning of some other related ritual symbols

Our exploration now turns to some other rituals of the Catholic traditions, and the ways the group views these rituals. Obviously, the Mass even though it occupies a central position in the ritual system does not cover the whole structure of worship. It is assumed in this research that if one aspect in a given constellation of rituals changes this will have repercussions on the other related signs. There is no

need to stress again that post-Vatican II is still engaged in accommodating the rest of the sacraments to the established position of the Eucharist. Consequently, the present inquiry attempted to discover how the changed rite of the Mass has made an effect on the evaluation of other related rituals by the group. That some of the innovatory changes introduced in the Mass had an effect on Confession, for example, was already demonstrated in this chapter. Confession appeared to have lost its customary appeal as a healing rite in view of the fact that for the respondents as a whole the new Mass has taken over its role in reconciling man to his God. It is generally assumed that every other ritual activity is essentially related to the Eucharist, which occupies a commanding position in the social hierarchy of the believing and worshipping community.

Our main concern was to discover whether the respondents did see a relation between the revised Mass and the rest of the sacramental system and what significance they attribute to this relationship. It was not possible within the scope of the inquiry to investigate the complexities of the various rites of passage representing crucial points in the life cycle of the individual nor to account for changing attitudes to them. Nonetheless, some very worthwhile insights were provided by the respondents when they came up for discussion.

The first theme was Baptism. It is a Catholic belief that by Baptism one is incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ. On being asked what they thought of it, some 10% dismissed it as a social convention still lingering on in the minds and habits of Catholics. The bulk, 90% of the group, said that they felt puzzled and confused about its real meaning. It is worthwhile pointing out that no one thought that Baptism signifies an infant's entry into the Eucharistic

community or into "the priesthood of the people of God". Although everybody agreed that Baptism is a symbol of belonging to the Christian way of life in some undefinable way, only 10% believed that Baptism is a gateway to salvation and that it is absolutely necessary for obtaining eternal life. Of those who maintained that Baptism is meaningful in someway or other, roughly 10% put forward the view that infant Baptism should be delayed because of the prevailing confusion about Christian beliefs and values in the contemporary climate of the "anonymous Catholic". A telling answer of this view was given by a respondent: "We are having choice in what to believe and how to believe in what we believe. It is unfair to impose on a child a commitment to Christian religious values which are no longer a unifying force in the Christian community at large". Several people in this category mentioned ecumenism as the main stimulus for their views. "We are living in an age of the ecumenical denominator", one active ecumenist exclaimed, "when it is no longer a good policy to overstress doctrinal differences". Others said that an infant is no longer socialised into a close-knit society with a unified system of values. "Our suburban society", one person said, "is cosmopolitan and cannot afford to be parochial. You cannot hang on to the sentiment of 'Coronation Street'. This is gone for good".

Yet emerging from these opinions came a strong feeling of ambivalence. An element of superstition figured largely in the descriptions of female respondents. The weight of convention became apparent in their answers. Some 5% of the respondents, mainly women, expressed their feeling of ambiguity. "You know", a young mother said, "I do not believe personally in the washing away of sins or in original sin, but one has to be on the safe side. You never know. It is better to be safe in case..." It is pertinent to recall what was found regarding beliefs in the existence of hell, purgatory and Limbo in the chapter dealing with these

collective representations. It was noted that the majority of those interviewed rejected the existence of Limbo as the place for unbaptised children to go to. This disbelief came out once more in full force. Coupled with this disbelief in some form or other, was a tenuous position on original sin. More than 60% rejected the belief in original sin and claimed that Baptism, in their view, has little connection with a washing away of sins. An example was given by one respondent who felt strongly on this point: "This picture of ablution might have been meaningful when the Church was able to tell us stories about the sinfulness of man, but for me its a lot of eye wash. Baptism symbolises your belief in a Christian God who is love and not one who is a masochist". By and large, Baptism was seen as a symbol rather than a sign. A symbol of what? Here responses became faint and blurred. "Tradition", one person said, "is a burden obscuring what you ought to believe. It is too difficult to make sense of the practice without denying the tyranny of convention". Thus the unstated problem for most was simply: initiation into what shape or idea of community?[1].

Similar views were expressed with regard to Confirmation. 90% of the respondents defined it as an initiatory rite by which the baptised person becomes an adult in the Church.

---

1. The new regulations on Infant Baptism give importance to the parents in educating their children in the faith and less to the god parents. In this the Church reverts to the family unit as the reservoir of personal commitment. It is the parents who are made responsible for transmitting the faith to their newly born infants and to socialise them into their value system. This shows a break with tradition in which god parents were regarded as active co-partners in the education of the children.

No consensus appeared on its significance except in the vaguest terms. Over 60% referred to it as a symbol of adolescence, a public renewal of baptismal vows and commitment to the Christian way of life. The remaining 40% expressed an attitude of disinterestedness accompanied with scepticism about the relevance of this sacrament. Apart from conventional definitions such as "Confirmation being a sign of being a soldier of Christ" or "signifying the adolescent's initiation into the community", no deeper significance was attributed to it. Significant in this respect was the insistence of many to defer its administration. As in the case of Baptism, it was strongly felt that the age of consent had been lowered in present society, and that adolescents should have a say in what to believe and to adapt themselves to the values of the communities in which they are born. A comment was: "What to make of Confirmation when it is given by a bishop out of the blue? Why can't the priest in the parish administer it since he is the one who structures the local community?" A more telling report was given by an elderly person: "There was a time when confirmation marked a young person's introduction into a local community recognizable and distinct from others. Catholic Confirmation meant that you had become an adult both in the Church as a whole and in the parish. Now this holds no longer. There is a universal Church, but hardly a parish in the old fashioned manner of speaking". These quotations are indicative of the general attitude. Attitudes to confession have been already introduced. We have seen how this rite has suffered a mutation on the plan of efficacious salvation. The washing away of sins as an efficatious rite was generally rejected. When asked what they thought about newly emerging forms of communal penitential celebration - some of which were in preparation at the time of this research - it was found that opinions were hesitant, reserved and cautious. 10% favoured reform and applauded a return to a communitarian form of recognizing one's sins in the presence of God without the intervention of a third party (the priest) but by and large

most were averse to what they called "emotionalism".[2.]

The changed notion of sin appeared to be of some significance in the evaluation of Confession. Reference was made to the belief of many respondents who do not subscribe to the doctrine of original sin. Baptism in their view does not cause a physical change in the baby, nor does it signify a purification except in a metaphorical sense. For them remission of sin is symbolic and the sign of water poured over the forehead of the baptised person has no particular efficacy. The same sort of idea cropped up in the discussion of Confession. Disbelief in the magical washing away of sins appeared as a leit-motif in the related replies. As we have seen, the fact that less and less people go for oral Confession showed for many that the Mass is no longer a sacred event because rules of prohibition, including that of Confession, have gone overboard. A theme of great anthropological interest rose during the discussion on Confession. It concerns the idea of sacrifice. It comes to this. Why should a person who is going to receive the Gift of Christ's Body as the source of forgiveness think that a separate rite is necessary? In other words: why should one go to Confession in order to become holy when the Eucharist itself is already the fount of purification and forgiveness. Together and alongside ideas of purification was the sentiment that sin is something both intersubjective and objective, personal and impersonal and that its location is not to be found in the devil as a supernatural agent. Over 80% believed that the word 'devil' and its equivalent is a metaphor for dealing with perceived realities of personal and social evil. One quotation will suffice to illustrate this view: "Sin is not something caused by the devil but by us. It is an expression of what is both inside and outside us in conflict with what we think we are or ought to be according to some ideal conception of what is good and desirable". Forgiveness of sins in this perspective cannot be an

2. Since the time of the research progress has been made to provide Catholics with a plurality of penitential exercises with or without sacrmental absolution tailored to different sex and age categories.

automatic affair engineered by the Church or anybody else.

Relevant to the above discussion was the theme of the 'last sacraments', now renamed "the Sacrament of the sick". This was touched upon when we were dealing with doctrinal beliefs. There was general agreement that this rite is important and useful. Yet there was a poverty and paucity of comments. Part of this poverty lay in the fact that very few saw it as a comforting rite for the old and sick in the passage from one stage to another.

As in the case of Baptism, 30% stated that they would call upon the priest to administer the last rites in order "to be on the safe side". An example of this attitude was given by a doubter of the relevance of the rite: "It is hard to know whether there is an after life. But it is wise to take out an assurance policy. It is only human to do so, is it not?" Considering the attenuation of traditional beliefs in the life hereafter with which we have dealt in the appropriate chapter, it was not surprising that attitudes to the topic of death carried strong emotional undertones stemming from different historical traditions in the community. The young were obviously not interested in expressing a definite view on the matter because the very idea of dying and sickness is not a subject of youthful interest. Representatives of the older generation were in two minds about it. "Receiving the Blessed Sacrament on your way out", one respondent said, "is very beautiful whatever happens after". But others said that extreme unction or the last rites could be easily abused as a magical passport. Death as a subject of discussion was taboo. Most people die in the hospital and, if one were to attend funeral services, one cannot learn anything about modern man's real feelings about death which, so many believe, is a natural end to life.[3] What for centuries was a meaningful proclamation of the resurrection after death has now

3. The literature on the psychological and social dimension of dying and death in modern society is receiving a good deal of attention from various disciplines. See, for example, the work of the American sociologist, G.Gorer, Death, Grief and Mourning, New York, 1967.

become less meaningful even for Christians because the old symbols are no longer fully adhered to. Recalling the changed attitudes of respondents to the old doctrines of the resurrection of the body and the life hereafter, it was patently clear that the ambiguity of these beliefs affected their views on the last rite. Noticeable was a reluctance on the part of most to go into any detail about the significance of the sacrament of the sick.

One of the interesting findings regarding the initiation rites discussed was that just as several people would like to have Masses said at home or within a circle of friends on appropriate occasions, so they urged the same thing for such rites as Baptism and Confirmation. Manifest in such desires is a tendency to wean these rites away from institutionalization and re-enact them in the context of family and group life. The majority of the people interviewed showed sympathy for official efforts to update the language and shape of the rites of passage to the extent that they witnessed them in church or were, or had been personally involved in them. The main criticism was that there is too much theologizing behind them with little regard for the social realities of specific communities. As to their relation to the Mass, hardly any explicit awareness was discovered that they are essentially and structurally related to the Eucharist. Little importance was attached as a whole to liturgical reform outside the Mass which, as we have seen, turned out to be the major source of anxiety and disenchantment. If the new rite comes over as a lop-sided affair in the experience of the people, little could be discovered in the case of their appreciation of the rites mentioned. The latter seem to have slid away from the field of consciousness. When describing respondents' attitudes to the ambiguity of the sacred regarding the Mass, it was stated that its sign activity, that is, its power of exerting control over the people in forming representations of the sacred was considered as being on the wane. This feeling was found to be absent in the

evaluation of the rites of passage. According to Van Gennep every status has a sacred aspect characterizing his three categories of separation, transition and aggregation. These categories are connected with a change of status and the passage from one limen or threshold to another. But in the light of what was said by respondents about the initiation rites it is doubtful whether these categorizations have application to the Christian rites of passage in a suburban community. It is important to bring out the import of this statement. To begin with Baptism. Whatever social status respondents attached to the rite, a significant minority did not regard Baptism as a magical rite nor as essentially sacred. Nor did they regard Confirmation as signifying a sacred passage along which the adolescent enters adult life. As a puberty rite, Confirmation has lost its meaning of passing into a sacred community. This holds good equally for the sacrament of the sick. It is certainly a crisis-rite but it would be going too far to say that it signifies for the people simply a limen endowed with sanctity or rather of bestowing a form of holiness required to make the passage to the other world. Baptism and Confirmtion do not produce a crisis; they represent initiation into a problematic world of ideals in which this and the other world are irretrievably mixed up in the various psychological and social processes of our time. In our perspective, it would be fair to say that the signs of these rites are being converted into symbols.

. . .

CONCLUSIONS

It is time to draw some pertinent conclusions from the findings within the boundaries of the theme of this chapter. This theme stood under the aegis of the sacramental sign of the Eucharist in its transformation in the perceptions, evaluations and social practice of the group. Our exploratory inquiry into the nature and scope of this transformation has shown a paradoxical situation as to the position of this sign in the life of the community on several fronts of analysis. This paradox lies in the fact that the present Eucharist means different things for the Church, the group as a collectivity and the individual members who compose it within the same boundaries of religious faith. To be precise: each collectivity has a stake in this sign but arrives at its value along different and sometimes contradictory routes.

To begin with the Church. Although sign and symbol under the canopy of sacramental reality mean different things, even while meaning something much more rich and complex than definitional constructs allow for, one of the principal findings is that the Church itself has failed to open the doors sufficiently wide for people to enter into the meaningful search for what ritual symbols can do for them. This leads us back to the sign. The often quoted Constitution on the liturgy does not provide a theological, much less a philosophical, disquisition on the meaning and role of symbolism in the liturgy. It takes this role for granted. Yet although there is a genuine desire on the part of the Church to make its basic rites more intelligible for the people who have to use them, there is little evidence in the Constitution that it is prepared to abandon or modify its traditional position on the sacramental sign. The old doctrine of the efficacy of the sign is transparent throughout and with it a magical view of its instrumentality. By closing further

experiential avenues in the field of the Mass the road is blocked for examining at both the theoretical and practical level what specific social groupings can contribute to making the Mass a more meaningful reality. As our evidence shows, the new Mass is by and large not meaningful for the group we have studied. One of the findings is that signs are continually converted into symbols, symbols into signs, resulting in a shifting of their referents. By freezing the Mass into a set of prescribed meanings, the Church does itself ill service.

It should be remembered that the new Mass is not a product of the people. This being so, there is no way of integrating its symbolic structures into wider ones which may be more commensurate with a culture or subculture. The evidence of this study suggests that the ideas and ideals of a liturgical community or of what constituents should go into its making are conflicting at the institutional and group levels. One can not prescribe what symbols ought to mean unless there is a pre-sharing of their importance and relevance by the people using them. The evidence also points to the artificiality of the new rite with a lack of roots in a historical tradition such as Merseyside Catholics. Secondly, as far as the people are concerned, the paradox referred to found its application. Leaving aside the spiritual satisfaction the group we studied may or may not have found in the Mass, the main thrust of the research shows that a rift exists between what the Church says the Mass is or ought to be and the group's comprehension of it. The findings indicate the dialectics of the interplay of sign and symbol within the arena of the intervening variables. Merseyside Catholics, particularly because of their special traditions, were shown to appreciate the Mass as a sign rather than as a symbol. Considering the peculiarity of ethnic religion which played such a part in their history, it was not surprising to discover that this factor had a considerable amount of impact on the group even if the majority of the group thought itself sufficiently emancipated from the grip of tradition. Given these conditions,

the research shows that the sign of the Mass is being converted into a symbol, but not along the lines indicated by the Church. Admittedly, the rite focusses on the togetherness of the people who celebrate it, but it does seem to bind the people round it. As R.Tanner has poin - ted out in his analysis of the attitudes of members of a Roman Ca - tholic parish in Liverpool to liturgical change, greater participation does not necessarily lead to an increased sense of community.[1]

Much the same can be said about the rest of the ritual symbols we have studied. The group's ambivalence here was even more pronounced. This could be partly explained by a lack of interest in their post - conciliar developments. But a great deal of ritual activity, whether religious or not, is closely involved in the structuring of personal and social relations in any social situation. It may be that so - cial mobility is associated with the breakdown of the local commu - nity, but one need not be surprised that a set of symbols, such as those involved in Christian rites of passage, is likely to become the subject of variant interpretations between groups or members of the same group. As became evident in this study, the self appeared to be a major focus in the appreciation of the group in so far as this aspect of the ritual dimension is concerned. For communication about religion to take place, the structures of symbols must be able to express something relevant about the ways in which people can relate their selfhood in relation to the community. It is, once more, the relation of the individual to his group symbol that brings into focus the nature of the religious malaise in complex society.

---

1. E.E.S. Tanner,'Reactions to Liturgical Change', Heythrop College Social Survey, Memorandum 6, 1970, p. 29.

Chapter VII

C O N C L U S I O N S

> "As to the question of what symbols this new faith will express itself with..whether or not they will be more adequate for the reality which they seek to translate, that is something which surpasses the human faculty of foresight..." - Durkheim[1].

It now remains to summarize the results of the inquiry and to formulate general conclusions within the limitations of the perspective in which the data were analysed. Most of the conclusions have already emerged during the course of the investigation, but our final task is to integrate them into the perspective which prompted the inquiry and relate them to the issues discussed in Chapter 1.

As a starting point it was postulated that religion when considered as a cultural system and process at the institutional, communal and individual level, interacts with the wider society in which it is historically incorporated. Without reducing religion simply to a cultural variable, it is like any other aspect of culture involved in a number of exchanges on the basis of the social experience of the people involved. Accordingly, three types of interactions were visualised, each deriving its force from expectations which are perceived differently by interest groups.

There is, first, the Church itself who under the auspices of Vatican II endorsed the principle of active participation of the laity in the life of the institution. By doing so the Church demonstrated that religion is not static and closed, but a self-regulating system

---

1. Durkheim, The Elementary Forms, p. 428.

except that it makes no appeal beyond itself in order to justify change. Clearly, the sort of exchange sought with the wider world is ultimately determined by the Church herself on the basis of the means at her disposal for realizing certain goals.

Secondly, the group of St. Jerome's. The group studied could only understand the changes within the Church according to their definition of the situation influenced by a great number of social and psychological determinants which entered their perceptions and attitudes.

Thirdly, the individual members of the group. While groups impose norms on individuals, it was assumed that these norms are flexible and that the individual can manoeuvre his course of action between different available alternatives. This is because there is always opposition between the individual and the group in respect of rights, obligations and expected behaviour.

The main burden of the study was to lay bare where and how the different interpretations of what religion should mean clashed within the groups involved from their vantage point and to what extent these conflicts have engendered tension and ambiguity in thought and attitudes. As was set out in Chapter 2, and as the title of the study indicates, this research has been mostly concerned with identifying processess of transformation. In sociological terms the study was concerned to find out how a group of Roman Catholics reshuffle the myths and values of their religious tradition in order to make them fit new experiences.

For this task both a modified use of Levi-Strauss's concept of bricolage and Bowker's definition of religion as 'route-finding activity' were found to be useful conceptual tools. With these methodological points in mind, let us now review the facts as they emerged during the course of the investigation.

Transformations in the quest for community

Ambiguity became evident in the sphere of community building in so far as the parish system is concerned. Vatican II legitimated the ideal of the local community as truly synonymous with the Church and not simply being a fragment of it. But this line of approach has not come to grips with the sociological question as to how new groupings of Catholics were to create parish communities that would realize the proposed ideal. On the basis of the findings it is difficult to escape the conclusion that expectations have met only partially with success. Moreover, the term 'community' which became a catch word in a number of contexts never materialised in a concrete social sense. St. Jerome's appears to be no exception in the quest for community.

Generally speaking, lay people in spite of the early promises of the democratization of the Church are still at the receiving end because their contribution to the parish council and other associations which serve to promote the interests of the commuters' parish were found to be negligible. The parish council being the basic new institution was not set up to engage in secular activities like fund-raising, but to act as an instrument for looking after the spiritual welfare of the 'people of God'. It was hoped initially that many of the local problems would be solved by inviting the laity to face them in group-discussion and by counting on the emergence of consensus that would commend itself to the local parish councils.

But the picture which has emerged from the inquiry is that contributions by lay people on the level of decision-making has been absorbed into an administrative routine with little regard for consent. Those lay leaders representing the community and acting on the parish council and parish associations were found to occupy an intermediate

position between what the archdiocese through the local priest had planned in advance and the specific needs of the parish. Although their strategic position of advisory leadership is supposed to form a base line of communication, its impact was clearly neutralised by lack of interest and support of the parishioners on the one hand and by official concerns and positions on the other. Different conceptions of how certain programmes should be implemented are unlikely to meet the demands of the local community. Therefore, the idea of the Church as a participating community would appear to have fallen short of the ideal in the sphere of decision-making. One reason for this is that with greater affluence and more choice there has been a move from formal communal to informal groupings and networks of social relations. After all, middle class people are to a considerable degree free from the constraints of kinship and are able to choose the locality in which they will live so that they can develop their own special interests. This is true of secular associations which people are free to join, but equally so of parish associations. As was shown, membership is marginal. The associations are kept alive by lobbyists and pressure groups for reasons which often appear to have little in common with stated goals. Thus it cannot be maintained by any stretch of the imagination that the laity as a whole has become a force in shaping the new structures at a grass root level.

The question to what extent the parish can be regarded as a community was not only determined by the views of the group but also by the realities of the wider society. While, for example, informal friendship groups exist and affiliation is now a matter of choice, it appeared that they are not integrated in the parish structures. It would seem, therefore, that religion in this sense does not provide a stable framework in which people can find meaning for making sense of social relationships. In particular, the parish is not able to deal with peer-groups on their own terms and the values they cherish.

This is an important element in understanding the present situation of the modern parish.

Transformations in the belief system

Of the three dimensions investigated, the one concerning the cognitive status of doctrinal beliefs and their relation to the perceptions of the group turned out to be the most resistant to analysis. As the findings illustrate, the selective process was visibly at work in the ways the respondents interpreted the credal beliefs. It was possible, to a limited extent, to link the interpretative models with some of the social and psychological factors arising out of the life style and experience of the respondents. There were, however, plenty of individualistic interpretations which did not conform to any general patterns. It must also be emphasised that the various meanings attached to beliefs by the respondents could not be reduced to the strictly social. Although respondents were quite aware that the beliefs they said they held were subject to traditional and social limitations, they did not accept that either the doctrines themselves or social interpretations of them did exhaust their significance, their meaning and their potentiality. In fact, their replies showed a critical awareness of the Catholic practice of the past of holding that personal faith should have a 'one-to-one' correspondence to the items of religious beliefs. To have personal faith, then, is one thing, but to live and experience it in a prescribed content another. Faith, as a consequence, was seen as something personally important which has a priority over the cognitive content of traditional belief.

Furthermore, the replies exemplified another aspect of the process whereby the dimension of supernatural revelation is relativised

and deprived of its sacral character. Since the teaching authorities of the Church are today far less concerned with prescribing a strict orthodoxy and more with the relevance of religion to contemporary life, it was but natural to expect that the priority of a given cosmology over practices loses its importance in religious behaviour. This was found to be so the case with most respondents. Living in a community where the general atmosphere of affluence and social achievement are prevalent, the Formby Catholics as a whole appeared to have little interest in keeping in tact the belief system for its own sake.

They were, however, seriously attempting to translate the traditional language of belief into a language of an alive faith within their means. Some of the metaphors used in this process indicated a demystification, while others pointed to a surprising insight into what the beliefs meant to some of the respondents.

Yet, with all use of metaphor and free interpretation it could not be concluded that the traditional senses of God have been entirely emptied of meaning. What can be said, then, is not that traditional beliefs have just disappeared, but that different uses are made of them by institutions and groups within them. As a corollary to this, the findings show the specificity of the Catholic dilemma in this respect. It was pointed out that people have conflicting models of the Church even since Vatican II began to make its impact felt. By concentrating so much on liturgical renewal, the movement for reform has given the impression that the question of belief does not deserve the attention it traditionally has held in Catholic consciousness. Nonetheless, the belief system has drifted away following the process of social life. But whereas the Church is still insisting on an institutional definition of Catholic belief and practice the reality of the situation is that Roman Catholics have moved beyond the confines

of institutionalisation. While making use of the 'depositum fidei' which serves as the pre-conditions, the group has moved to an understanding of limits of belief and its dwindling importance in their lives with the implicit recognition that it may hold out new avenues for realising the potential richness of faith.

Transformations in the moral dimensions

The findings in this area show a very weak connection between cognitive beliefs and values in the experience and evaluation of the group. This is to say that the traditional unity of faith and morals appears to be broken in the awareness of the group. Like other Catholics in this country and elsewhere, respondents shared the view that the dissent from the norms of the Church, especially those connected with sexual morality, was inevitable given the general changes in ethical attitudes in the wider society. It was hardly possible, therefore, to maintain the traditional congruence between religion and morals. It would be more accurate to say that the morality of the respondents is following the trends of the general social morality rather than being guided by strict traditional Catholic rules. Attitudes to abortion proved an exception to the general trend.

What the images of the group brought to light was the corrosion of the concept of a traditional ethical God as the source of rewards and punishment as well as of obligation. Recalling the data on the beliefs, it can be seen that the tendency among the respondents pointed to seeing God in terms of immanence and to empty the traditional doctrines of reward and punishment in the life hereafter. Also the idea of obligation as coming from a sacred source, which in the past was experienced as something extrinsic in the reinforcement of sanctions, has certainly lost its appeal in the consciousness of the group. It is tempting to

establish at this point that an ongoing transformation of beliefs inevitably implies a transformation in ethical attitudes. But the correspondence between the two in modern Catholic consciousness is far from clear.

Certainly the norms of the middle class as well as those of established religion were found to be factors in the attitudes to some of the issues discussed like birth control, divorce, remarriage, optional celibacy for priests, etc. Having moved further away from the ethnic grouping to which most Cathlics belonged in the past, socially mobile Catholics in the housing estate reflect the ethos of self-realization and achievement which goes with their social position and life style in the community.

At a deeper level, however, the moral crisis focussed on the tangled question of the interrelationship of principles and Church rules. There was enough evidence to say that behind the replies lay confusion and puzzlement concerning this interrelationship in urban society. While the Church has gone some way in loosening its grip on moral standards by inviting lay people to share moral responsibility in conducting their moral lives, little headway has been made in helping people to apply Christian principles to urban conditions in industrialized societies. Catholics in the past were equipped with standards of morality which helped them to adjust to the face-to-face contacts of a communal relationship as they once existed in the parishes, but which leaves them much less informed about the problems that arise from the fact that they live and work today amongst strangers.

Given the fact that reinterpretation of Catholic morality has been undertaken by a number of theologians often opposed to the official stances of the Church, a large amount of confusion has been generated

in the whole area of the application of religion in moral life. The ambivalence of this was expressed by considerable confusion in the minds of the group. To allow, on the one hand, Catholics to interpret responsibly rules for conduct and, on the other, to prevent them from applying them on the grounds that the Church is the sole guardian of morality has produced a curious impasse, or rather a schizophrenic state of mind even among those who felt little commitment to the Church.

The majority, while recognizing the inadequacy of a system of rules in dealing with modern life, favoured a re-examination of controversial issues so that the connection between principles and rules would be made more consistent by mutual correction and adjustment. Others again while rejecting some of the principles and holding on to others declared that they got on with the job of living a decent life without bothering their heads about the teachings of the Church.

Other variations on the same theme could not be further explored. However, from a sociological point of view the matter of moral choice brings home again the complexity of the moral life in a modern suburb. It has been maintained by some sociologists and anthropologists that each 'form of life' provides its own criteria of intelligibility.[1]. It was certainly possible to say a decade ago that when a Catholic said, for example, that contraception was intrinsically wrong, and a non-Catholic maintained that this was not so, neither would have been thought as contradicting each other since they argued from different sets of principles which defined the notion of wrongness. But what happens if this 'form of life' collapses into a plurality of modes? A part of this study has shown that the Catholics investigated not only belonged to different life worlds, but also embrace without fear of contradiction conflicting modes of thought and action within the same faith.

---

1. This view is put forward by P. Winch in his book The Idea of a Social Science, Oxford, 1958.

To maintain, therefore, that most of our behaviour is rule-governed and obtains its justification from a 'form of life' does not seem to have universal applicability in urban society when separate self-contained ways of thought and action are not really separate entities. Marcel Mauss argued that in archaic societies social exchanges, including economic ones, stem from a unified and single moral basis. In industrial society certainly this is not the case.

Transformations in the liturgical dimension

Paradoxes in this sensitive area of worship were clearly observable. These were exemplified in present day liturgical worship. As has been shown, ritual in St. Jerome's did not develop according to expectation of Vatican II. The idea that the People of God should share in the universal priesthood or Christ in the enactment of liturgy remains an ideal.

On the available evidence it could be argued that the present Mass is much more meaningful than the one it replaced. It suggests a far greater degree of lay participation than before, but on closer inspection this participation is a passive affair consisting of stereotyped verbal responses on the part of the worshippers to a fabricated text the lines of which has been laid down in advance. To use an analogy, a new script has been provided and the people have been invited to take an active part in interpreting the lines of the script, but the meaning of the text somehow remains foreign to them. The point is that bricolage in this respect is severely limited both on the side of the institution and that of the group. Whatever sense individual respondents have been reported to make of it, the new ritual considered as a signifying practice appears to be frozen without much relevance to the ongoing dialectics of the community as it is moving away from being a closed one to that of an open one under the impact of mobility

and further trends in suburban culture. To what extent is the new Mass transformed and how does it 'fit' the aspirations of the group as a meaningful symbolic practice expressing the life of the community? This question was posed in the first chapter and is of central importance in diagnosing the trend in symbolic processes.

First, in spite of Vatican II the priest is still in theory and practice the efficient instrument in the enactment of ritual activities especially those concerned with the Mass. People were quite aware that little has changed, in spite of the fact that he is facing the people and has relinquished his privileged position in the sanctuary. While most regarded him as a reduced professional who can no longer claim leadership in non-ritual spheres, his continuing manipulation of the sacred as his sole prerogative due to ordination has created mystification in the minds of the group. Here the sacred and profane assumed an uneasy alliance in his person and work. Stated in simple terms, he partakes of two dimensions without clear boundaries. His functions are indeed diffused.

The same can be said about the role of the laity in ritual worship. The way they are now participating is a half-hearted compromise. If the quality of the sacred is believed to reside in the 'Holy People' of God as Vatican II set out to demonstrate in its emphasis on the democratization of the Church, the actual practice does not embody this promise. The stress has been upon diluting the "wholly other" nature of the sacred and on removing its remoteness from the everyday world of the faithful. Clearly neither the 'wholly other' sense of the sacred nor its socially integrating force are much in evidence in worshipping behaviour, but nor can it be said that the new symbolism of the Mass appears to bring out how the people are contributing to making present the new orientations towards the sacred in their midst.

This ambivalence in the sharing of ritual power indicates a much deeper level of crisis with respect to the symbolization of the sacred itself. There was enough evidence in this study to show that the majority of the respondents bemoaned the absence of the sacred element in the new Mass. Because traditions do not die overnight, it was understandable that the reported reactions were averse to new fangled conceptions of the Eucharist propagated by liberal theologians and lay experts. The new move set afoot in the wake of Vatican II in the early 60's attempted to wean the people away from a too literal conception of sacramental efficacy in terms of cause and effect implying a magical conception of its role in bringing about the effects of salvation in the soul of the recipient. Although at the time when the fieldwork was carried out, the name of the French rebel Archbishop Lefebvre was not heard of, his recent rise as the antagonist of what Vatican II hoped to establish is not a mere index of reaction to changes in the liturgy and to the Church's adjustment to liberal tendencies.[1] The Archbishop's stance on the Tridentine Mass rests on the assertion that the state of the liturgy is the touchstone of the Church's health in all other fields. The quibble is not apparently over the use of Latin, but in the writer's opinion over the function of sacramental signs such as has been sanctioned since Trent. What the Archbishop and his followers fear is that the tinkering with traditional sign-practices and their underlying theology of the sacred empties the signs themselves.

---

1. When one considers that an opinion poll in France showed that 28 per cent of French Catholics supported Lefebvre in his defiance of the Pope, with 24 per cent supporting the Pope, with the remainder undecided, it is not so easy to dismiss his campaign as that of an ultra-traditionalist enmeshed in nostalgic memories of the glories of Catholic ritual. See The Tablet, 11th December, 1976, p. 1,208.

This is to say that the identification of the visible sign itself as the bearer of the sacred element still persists in the attitudes of a great number of Catholics. Such attitudes cannot so easily be attributed to cultural time lag whether they support the Tridentine Mass or not. The revulsion, for example, many of the respondents felt about the new ways in which the consecrated bread is distributed (like receiving Communion while standing and on the hand, or receiving it from lay people) may well be an indication that the old theory of sacramental signs as purveyors of grace is not yet wholly dead. As Thomas O'Dea[2] has pointed out, ritual worship while presenting to the participant an objectified symbolic order is always in danger of being cut off from the subjective experience of the participants who over a long period of time have been accustomed to regard the ritual elements themselves as holy instead of seeing them as pointers to what they signify. The charge frequently made by respondents that the Church has 'Protestantized' its worship is somewhat valid. But this charge is not quite justified if we take into consideration the symbolic dilemma facing the institutions in its effort to make ritual relevant to modern life. Also while there is a genuine desire in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy to make the rites more intelligible, there is sufficient evidence in that document to show that it was not prepared to abandon its position on the sign.

Lastly, the innovations in ritual have over time brought to light at a deeper level of collective awareness the interdependence of myth and ritual. It was argued that belief and ritual confront and mutually confirm one another in presenting the image of the corporate body with its hierarchy of social relationships and that the effectiveness of the

---

2. Thomas O'Dea, Five Dilemmas in the institutionalization of Religion in Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, Vol.I, October, 1961.

ritual symbol depends on its ability to present to the participants its inner structure. Returning to one of the earlier questions raised in the introduction, is it possible to say that the new Mass symbolises this interdependence as well as it was designed to do? This question raises, of course, more problems than it can possibly meet within the confines of our empirical data. But the following observations are worth stating.

The new rite of the Mass and its relationship to the parish community hardly resembles anything in the way of an agape, that is a ritual banquet of love between individuals who share the same views of the sacred and of life. It can hardly be expected that suburban communities can have this intense relationship. It is surely not merely a question of the size of the congregation and its alleged anonymity, but that of changing relationships in urban society. Thus it is doubtful whether the frequently heard remark that large parishes should be abolished as they tend to emphasize the anonymity of the worshippers does not seem to be the issue here. The desire for house or group- Masses involving only a number of families gathering together with other families to celebrate their unity in a large community is likely to be destructive to the Christian idea of fellowship extended to all men and to which the Church is committed in spite of its effort to facilitate a bridge between universal and local community. Moreover, it is futile to think that such household liturgies would create this sense of intimacy and friendship which is felt lacking in the present rite. Such an attempt to the extent that is possible would turn ritual into a small scale privatized affair. The desired intimacy in the search for community cannot be artificially produced, but is one of reciprocal causality on the basis of exchange commensurate with the type of society one is dealing with.

It is worth quoting here the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy to recall which symbolic elements are presumed to be connected with the Mass as a signifying practice. The conciliar document says: "At the Last Supper .. Our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the Sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed .. (art. 47). The text states without equivocation what the Eucharist means in specific terms. Central to the whole set of metaphors used here to describe the metaphysical reality of the Eucharist is the notion of sacrifice which is a gift made to God expressing reciprocal relationship through the mediation of Christ. The worshipper enters into communion with God by taking the consecrated bread and wine, and at the same time he makes an offering to God in order to acquire a share in the divine life. The whole question of how these separate elements, each presupposing the other, are related to other ritual in use is extraordinarily complex. But given the empirical reality of the rite, it is not too fanciful to suggest that the notion of the sacrificial aspect of the Mass has suffered a mutation.

It was pointed out in the introductory chapter that the cosmological idea of the 'mystical Body' if not rejected was considerably modified in the conciliar documents. Sociological sense tells us that such a minor change has significant repercussions on the perceptions of the faithful in particular when the taboos surrounding the Mass have been removed like abstension from food and personal preparation through sacramental confession. We can now accept, as Mary Douglas and other anthropologists have shown in their studies of alien cultures, that bodily experience and the body image are the major source of the ritual symbols of those cultures. While it is obvious that the sacrificial element in the new

rite has not been eliminated in the pull between communitarianism and individualism, the overriding conclusion, nevertheless, is that the image of the corporate body as an ontological reality is in disarray because the traditional concept of corporateness, the exemplar of which is to be found in primary groups, has lost its appeal for people who are socially mobile. Evidently, the anthropological cliché of 'myth equals ritual' is in need of rethinking in the context of modern society. While the magical conception of the sacrifice of the Mass has certainly gone, its new substitution has not been able to capture the relationship of myth and ritual in modern society.

. . . .

APPENDIX I

The Method of Research

The nature of the inquiry required a combination of investigatory techniques. The techniques used were interviews in depth of families chosen randomly from the parish register of St. Jerome's, extensive discussions with key-informants, and participant observation. When data obtained otherwise are used, this is stated in the text.

Sampling Approval to hold a survey in the parish was sought and obtained from the parish priest. After some deliberation, it was thought wise that his approval should be communicated to members of households to be selected from the register by a letter stating the purpose of the survey and establishing the identity of the investigator, rather than by a general announcement from the pulpit. The interviews with members of the households constituted the central core of the study. Ninety-five interviews with householders were successfully completed. It was originally planned to sample the entire Catholic population of St. Jerome's. The estimated number of Catholics in the parish at that time was 1,400.[1] It was decided to select 100 people to obtain interviews, that is 1 in 20 of the population. But the 1,400 people would include nominal Catholics. It seemed reasonable, therefore, to select the households from the parish register rather than from the population in general as defined by the Catholic Directory.

Although the parish register might be incomplete because of the floating population in Formby, this was a factor which the investigator obviously had to ignore. As the investigator wished to interview families rather than individuals, he decided to select a sample of households, and

---

1. Catholic Directory (1965-1975)

to include only those members who were adults, that is, 18 year of age and over. The term 'family' was not restricted to a group of closely-related individuals, but was extended to include both single persons living alone. The parish register listed at that time 403 households. As this was a parish of a high proportion of young couples, it seemed reasonable to assume that the average number of adults per household would be 2 persons. Therefore, if I were to select 1 in 10 households, I should be likely to arrive at the required number of 100 persons. Of the 40 households selected, families in 4 of them had moved and could not be traced, and one family refused to be interviewed. This left me with 35 households. The total number of adults in these households was 95, all of whom were interviewed in depth.

The age structure of the members of the households selected was as follows:

18 - 19	6
20 - 29	13
30 - 39	25
40 - 49	20
50 - 59	11
60 and over	20
total no. of persons	95

The sex distribution of the sample

Males	43	Females	52
total no. of persons			95

The occupational structure of the sample

non-manual	80
manual	15
total no. of persons	95

All the interviews were conducted personally by the investigator.

Use of key-informants

The investigator was able to live in Formby throughout the period of investigation which lasted more than a year. By living in the housing estate he was able to participate in many social and religious activities in the parish and in the town. A considerable amount of time was spent visiting organizations, associations, clubs, pubs, fetes, and countless informal activities. Contact with people involved in these activities yielded very useful information and provided valuable insights into the life styles of the group. Yet, people's beliefs and attitudes could not be so easily inferred during these informal meetings and only came to light when they were willing to talk about themselves. This happened frequently when their curiosity was aroused about the presence of the investigator as an informal observer.

From the start the investigator gave general exaplanations of what he was doing and why he attended these activities. But people were keen and asked questions about the project. Once they were told that he was a priest who having lived for a number of years as a missionary in Africa and come to Formby because of personal and academic reasons to study what was happening to Roman Catholics, the air was cleared. The

fact that he was not attached to the dioceses and did not carry out the survey on behalf of the parish itself helped to clarify his role as observer more clearly.

In the first stage the investigator was introduced by friends and well wishers to many leaders of associations. They acted as important key-informants on the religious and social life in Formby as a whole. They were mostly those who at the time of the investigation were involved in parochial and secular activities. They were of great help, in that much of the information collected from them served as a guide line in the construction of the questionnaire. Many of the terms were found to be irrelevant and too abstract, reflecting the bias of the investigator. For this reason, a number of interviews were arranged on an informal basis with ten people from two other parishes in Formby. The results were not included in the final analysis but were of great value in making the final draft of the interview schedule.

The inquiry

An open-ended interview was designed to gather information from the members of the households. The schedule can be found in Appendix II. All the interviews were conducted at the respondents' own homes and varied from one hour to over two hours.

The majority of interviews took place in the evening because, in most cases, contact with married people could only be made when either husband or wife or both had returned from work. It was rarely necessary to explain the purpose of the visit as it had already been explained in the introductory letter. The responses were recorded in writing during the interviewing. This was all the more necessary since many of the questions were dealing with abstruse matters, while other were left

ambiguous in order to discover clues as to what lay behind stereotyped answers.

In presenting the proportional distribution of responses to questions, percentages have been based on the number of householders of the random sample. All percentages have been rounded off to the nearest whole percent since computations carried out to several decimal places did not seem wise to the investigator to make use of some index or scale construction without doing violence to the material. As a rule, a scale construction assumes that one uni-dimensional idea is being measured rather than a concept that is defined by the intersection of several ideas. Survey questions, for example, are usually designed to mesure only one univocal idea at the time, even if individuals are allowed to determine their own position on the scale. In deciding to which extent individual replies 'represented' the norms of the group and the other way round, the investigator had to fall back on his perceptive understanding of the implicit assumptions of the group and of the culture involved.[2]

In spite of this limiting factor, the most striking feature about the replies was the basic similarity and direction of the replies irrespective of the age and sex structure of the group. Correlations of age and sex with attitudes to particular questions were for this reason illustrated in the text without stating their exact statistical incidence except when this could validly be done.

This finding may suggest that the effects of age are less important than are historical trends in the culture of the people. The similarity of the basic replies, then, may indicate what a particular group of Catholics as trend setters will be thinking in the near - future.

---

2. For a discussion of a methodological approach to the study of implicit meanings, see Mary Douglas, Implicit Meanings, London : Routledge, 1975.

APPENDIX II

The following is a copy of the interview schedule used in the interviews in the parish of St. Jerome.[1]

Interview schedule

Section I. Family

1. Name:
2. Date of birth:
3. Place of birth:
4. Marital status:
5. Education received:
6. Occupation:
7. Present address:
8. How long have you been living at this address?
9. Where did you live before that?

Section II. Parish Community

10. How long have you lived in this parish?
11. Do you consider the parish as the ideal expression of the People of God as proposed by Vatican II?
12. Do you think it is a good thing to have a parish council?
13. What activities are there in the parish, apart from the services in the Church?
14. What do you think of these activities?
15. Are there any activities which you would like to see in your parish, which are not there already?

1. in many cases these questions were used as a guide to explore beliefs and attitudes by extensive discussion rather as exact questioning to which definite answers could be given.

16. Do you yourself or any members of your family take part in Catholic activities outside the parish?

17. Do you help the work of the parish in any other way?

18. How do you see the work of the priest in the parish?

19. Do you think that the priest should be the creator of the local community or simply the minister of the sacraments?

20. What do you think of the suggestion that lay people are members of the universal priesthood of the people of God?

21. What is your attitude to having married priests?

22. Are you in favour of optional celibacy for priests?

23. What do you think about women being ordained priests?

24. Do you think that women in general take a greater part in the religious and social life of the parish than before?

Section III. The Church

25. How do you see the Church now after Vatican II?

26. Do you think that the democratization of the Church is something desirable?

27. What do you think of the Catholic view that authority in the Church is a divine institution?

28. Would you like to see further changes in the ways in which authority is exercised by the clergy?

29. What do you think about the ecumenical movement in the Church?

30. Do you or members of the family take any part in ecumenical activities in the parish?

Section IV. Doctrines

31. Do you think Catholics find it difficult to accept traditional beliefs as they were taught in the past?

32. Do you think that Catholic doctrines should be taught in schools?

33. Do you think that children should be taught religious beliefs by the parents before they go to school?

34. What do you think is the purpose of Catholic schools?

35. How do you see the traditional image of God as a Father?

36. How do you understand the doctrine that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?

37. What does Christ's death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead mean to you?

38. What do you feel about the new emphasis on the Holy Spirit?

39. How would you express your understanding of our resurrection from the dead?

40. How do you understand the doctrines of Heaven and Hell?

41. What would you say the doctrine of Purgatory means?

42. Do you believe in the existence of the devil?

43. Do you think that the teaching of doctrines is a good thing but that they should be adapted to changing needs?

Section V. Morality

44. It is often said that the Church to-day allows more freedom to Catholics in matters of morality. Would you say that this is the case from your point of view and experience?

45. Do you approve of Pope Paul's ruling on birth control?

46. Do you approve of abortion?

47. Do you think that a case can be made for Catholics to divorce and remarry?

48. Are you in favour of interfaith - marriages as a means of furthering the union of Christian churches?

49. Would you agree with the suggestion that the Church should be more concerned with social justice than with administrative and liturgical reforms?

50. What changes in the moral rules of the Church would you like to see with respect to family life?

Section VI. Worship

51. Do you attend Sunday Mass in your own parish or somewhere else?

52. In what sense would you call yourself a regular or occasional attender?

53. When you go to Mass, do you go as a family or separately?

54. What is your attitude to the new Mass compared to your experience of the Latin Mass?

55. What do you like best about the new Mass?

56. Do you approve of receiving Communion without going first to Confession?

57. Would you approve of the suggestion that forgiveness of sins can be obtained outside Confession by partaking for example in penitential exercises performed in public?

58. Do you think that the new Mass allows for private prayer and personal devotion?

59. Would you agree with those who say that the new Mass lacks dignity as compared to the Latin Mass?

60. What do you think of the suggestion that there should be house Mass besides those celebrated in the parish church?

61. What do you feel about the new custom of receiving Communion on the hand?

62. Do the many readings from the Scriptures during services mean a lot to you?

63. Would you like to see further changes in the liturgy?

64. Do you feel that going to Mass helps you to see the Eucharist as a symbol of the local community?

65. Do you think that lay participation in the Mass has gone too far or not far enough?

66. Do you agree with the suggestion that children should be baptised at home?

67. What importance do you attach to the practise of having babies baptised as soon as possible?

68. What does Confirmation mean to you?

69. Do you think it is a good thing for Catholics to insist on the last rites when seriously ill or dying?

Section VII *Devotions*

70. Do you attend public devotions such as Benediction, Stations of the Cross, May devotions?

71. Would you say that the veneration of the Saints has lost importance to you?

72. What do you think of prayer groups and new ways of meditation outside official services?

73. Do you think children should learn to pray in their own way?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbot, W., and Gallagher, J.(eds) — The documents of Vatican II, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1966.

Ariès, Philippe, — Western Attitudes towards Death, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1974.

Armstrong, D.M. — Belief Truth and Knowledge, Cambridge, 1973.

Barthes, R. — Mythologies, Paladin, 1973.

Baum, G. — Man Becoming, New York : Herder & Herder, 1971.

——— — 'The Cardinal Bea Memorial Lecture', in The Month June, 1972.

Bellah, R.N. — 'Religious Evolution', in American Sociological Review, 29 (3), 1964, 358 - 374.

——— — Beyond Belief, New York : Harper, 1970.

Berger, P.L. — The Sacred Canopy, New York : Doubleday, 1967.

Blumer, H. — Symbolic Interactionism, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey : Prentice Hall, 1969.

Blundell, F.O. — Old Catholic Lancashire, vol. 3, London, Burns and Oates, 1941.

Bocock, R.J. — Ritual in Industrial Society, London : Allen and Unwid, 1974.

Bode, J.G. — 'Status and Mobility of Catholics vis-a-vis several Protestant Dominations' in Sociological Quaterly, II (i), 1970.

Bossy, J. — The English Catholic Community : 1576 - 1850, London : Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976.

Boulard, F. — Introduction to Religious Sociology, London : Darton, Longman and Todd, 1960.

Boulding, K.E. — The Image, Michigan : Ann Arbor Book, 1961.

Bowker, J. — The Sense of God, Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1973.

Brothers, J. — Church and School, Liverpool University, 1964.

Burke, T. — Catholic History of Liverpool, Liverpool, 1901.

Caparole, R., and Grumelli, A.	The Culture of Unbelief, University of California, 1971.
Dillistone, F.M.	Traditional Symbols and the Contemporary World, London : Epworth Press, 1973.
Dix, G.	The Shape of the Liturgy, London : Dacre Press 1945.
Douglas, M.	'The Healing Rite', Man, 1970, 303.
_____	Purity and Danger, London : Routledge, 1966.
_____	Natural Symbols, Pelican, 1973.
_____	Implicit Meanings, London : Routledge, 1975.
Durkheim, E. and Mauss, M.	Primitive Classification (1903), London : Cohen and West, 1965.
Durkheim, E.	Sociology and Philosophy (1924) London : Cohen and West, 1965.
_____	The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (1912), London : 1915.
Eketh, P.	Social Exchange Theory, London : Heinemann, 1974.
Eliot, T.S.	Notes towards a Definition of Culture, London : Faber and Faber, 1962.
Eulul, J.	The New Demons, London : Mambrays, 1973.
Evans - Pritchard, E.	Theories of Primitive Religion, London : 1965.
Fichter, J.	'The parish and social integration', Social Compass, 1, 1960.
Fitzsimons, J.	'The Liverpool Diocesan Pastoral Council', Clergy Review, 1968, 61 - 72.
Frankenberg, R.	Communities in Britain, Penguin Books, 1966.
Fromm, E.	Psychoanalysis and Religion, New Haven, 1973.
Gay, J.D.	The Geography of Religion in England, London : Duckworth, 1971.
Geertz, C.	Islam Observed, New Haven, 1968.
Giddens, A.	Emile Durkheim : Selected Writings, Cambridge, 1972.
Ginsberg, M.	'Durkheim's Ethical Theory' in R.A. Nisbet, Emile Durkheim, New York : Prentice Hall, 1963.

Glasner, P.E. — The Sociology of Secularisation, London : Routledge, 1977.

Glock, C.Y., and Stark, R. — Religion and Society in Tension, Chicago : Rand McNally, 1965.

Goddijn, W. — The deferred Revolution, Elsevier, Amsterdam 1975.

Gorer, G. — Death, Grief and Mourning, New York, 1967.

Gossman, E. — 'Woman as Priests ?' in Concilium, 4, 1968.

Grainger, R. — The Language of the Rite, London : Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974.

Greeley, A.M. — 'Religious symbolism, Liturgy and Community' in Concilium, 2, no.4, February, 1971.

_____ — The New Agenda, New York : Doubleday, 1973.

_____ — 'The sexual Revolution among Catholic Clergy', Review of Religious Research, 14, no.2, 1973.

Greeley, A.M. et al. — Catholic Schools in a Declining Church, Sheed & Ward, Inc. Kansas City, 1976.

Hebblethwaite, P. — The Theology of the Church, no.8, Clergy Book Service, Hales Corners, Wiscousin, 1969.

Hornsby - Smith, M.P., and M.C. Mansfield, — 'English Catholicism in change', Social Compass, 16, (3), 1969.

Houtart, F. — 'Conflicts of authority in the Catholic Church' In Social Compass, 16, (3), 1969.

Kelleher, S. — Divorce and Remarriage for Catholics ? New York : Doubleday, 1971.

Kelly, E. — Viking village, The Story of Formby, Formby, 1973.

Kokosalakis, N. — 'Aspects of conflicts between the structure of Authority and the Beliefs of the Laity in the Roman Catholic Church' in M. Mill (ed), A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain, 4, SCM Press, 1971.

_____ — 'The Contemporary Metamorphosis of Religion ?' in The Human Context, vol. 3, 1974.

Kolakowski, L. — Marxism and Byond, Paladin, 1971.

Kotre, J.N. — The View From the Border, A Social - Psychological Study of Current Catholicism, Gill & Macmillan, 1971.

Kroeber, A.L. — Anthropology, New York : Harcourt Brace, 1948.

Laslett, P. — The World We Have Lost, London : Methuen, 1965.

Lenski, G. — 'The Religious Factor in Detroit, Revisited' in American Sociological Review, 36, 1971.

Lévi - Strauss, C. — Structural Anthropology (Paris, 1958), New York : Anchor Books, 1967.

_____ — Totemism (Paris, 1962), London, 1966.

_____ — The Savage Mind (Paris, 1962), London : Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966.

_____ — The Raw and the Cooked (Paris, 1964), New York : Harper, 1969.

Ling, T. — A History of Religions East and West, London : Macmillan, 1968.

Luckmann, T. — The Invisible Religion, London, 1967.

Lukes, S. — Emile Durkheim : His Life and Work, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1973.

McCaffery, P.G. — 'A Sociological Analysis of the concerns of ... pressure - groups in the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands and in England', Acts of the 12th Conference on the Sociology of Religion, Lille, CISR Secretariat, 1973.

MacIntyre, A., and Ricoeur P., — The Religious Significance of Atheisme, Columbia University Press, 1969.

Martin, B. — 'Comments on some Gallup Poll Statistics' in D.A. Martin (ed), A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain, 1968, 1.

Martin, D.A. — The Religious and the Secular, London 1969.

_____ — 'Church, Denomination and Society' in M. Mill (ed), A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain, 5, SCM Press, 1972.

_____ — 'Christianity, Civic Religion and Three Counter Cultures', The Human Context, vol. 6, no. 3, 1974.

Mauss, M. — The Gift (1925), London : Cohen and West, 1954.

Mays, J.B. — Growing up in the City, Liverpool University Press, 1956.

Mead, G.H. — Mind, Self and Society, Chicago : 1934.

Moll, H. — Identity and the Sacred, Blackwell, 1976.

Needham, R. — Belief, Language and Experience, Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1972.

Nisbet, R. — Social Change and History, New York, 1969.

O'dea, T.F. — The Sociology of Religion, New Yersey : Prentice Hall, 1966.

_____ — The Catholic Crisis, Boston and Bacon Press, 1968.

_____ — 'Five Dilemma's in the Institutionalization of Religion', Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, vol.i, October, 1961.

O'Connor, E. — The Pentecostal Movement in the Catholic Church, Notre Dame University, 1971.

Otto, R. — The Idea if the Holy, Oxford, 1950.

Pahl, R.E. — Readings in Urban Sociology, Pergamon, 1968.

Pickering, W.S.F. — 'Who goes to Church ?' in C.L. Mitton (ed.). Social Sciences of the Churches, Edinburgh, 1972.

Pickett, K. — 'Migration in the Mersey Area in Merseyside' in R. Lawton and C.M. Cunningham (eds), Merseyside Social and Economic Studies, The University of Liverpool, 1971.

Rahner, K. — 'Der anonyme Christ', Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie, 86, 1964.

Richards, M. — The Liturgy in England, London : Geoffrey Chapman, 1966.

Rieff, Ph. — The Triumph of the Therapeutic, New York, 1968.

Roche, D. — The Catholic Revolution, New York, 1968.

Schillebeeckx, E. — The Eucharist, London : Sheed and Ward, 1968.

Shannon, W.D. — A Geography of organised Religion in Liverpool, University of Leverpool, 1965 (unpublished thesis, Dep. of Geography, Liverpool).

Sheed, F.J. — Is it the same Church ? London : Sheed and Ward, 1968.

Shiner, L. — 'The Concept of Secularisation in Empirical Research', Journal of the Scientific Study of Religion, vol. 6, 1967.

Spencer, A.E.C.W. — 'The Demography of Catholicisme', The Month, April, 1975.

Spencer, A.E.C.W.	'The Structure and Organsation of the Catholic Church in England' in J.D. Halloran and J. Brothers (ed), Uses of Sociology, London : 1966.
Sperber, D.	Rethinking Symbolism, Cambridge, 1975.
Stacey, M.	Tradition and Change, London : Oxford UP, 1960.
Stark, R. and Glock, C.Y.	American Piety, University of California, 1968.
Steiner, G.	Language and Silence, Pelican, 1969.
Stevas, Norman St. John.	The Agonizing Choice, Eyre and Spottiswood, London : 1971.
Stoner, R.	Liverpool's Hidden Story, Billinge, Lancashire, 1957.
Tanner, R.E.S.	Reaction to Pastoral Change, Heythrop College Social Survey, Memorandum 7, 1970.
————	Reaction to Liturgical Change,Heythrop College Social Survey, Memorandum 6, 1970.
Thomas, Keith	Religion and the Decline of Magic, London : Weindenfeld and Nicolson, 1971.
Thorns, D.	Suburbia, Paladin, 1973.
Trevelyan, G.M.	English Social History, London : Longman, 1944.
Turner, V.W.	The Ritual Process, Pelican, 1974.
Van Gennip, A.	The Rites of Passage, London : Routledge, 1960.
Vergote, A.	'Symbolic gestures ans actions in the Liturgy', Concilium,vol. 2, 1971.
Vogel, C.	'An Alienated Liturgy', Concilium, vol. 2, 1972.
Walker, F.	Historical Geography of South West Lancashire, Chetham Society, 1939.
Walker, R.B.	'Religious changes in Liverpool in the Nineteenth Century', Journal of Ecclesiastical History, XLX, no. 2, Oct. 1968.
Ward, C.K.	Priests and People, Liverpool, 1961.
Watts, A.W.	Myth and Ritual in Christianity, Beacon, 1968.
Weber, Max	'Science as a vocation' in Gerth., and C.W. Mills (eds) From Max Weber : Essays in Sociology, London : Routledge, 190_6
Wilson, B.	Religion in Secular Society, Pelican, 1969.
————	Contemporary Transformations of Religion, Oxford University Press, 1976.
Winch, P.	The Idea of a Social Science, Oxford, 1958.
Worseley, P.	The Trumpet Shall Sound, Paladin, 1970.
Yinger, J.M.	Sociology Looks at Religion, London : 1969.