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Since the Second World War  
Michael P. Hornsby-Smith  
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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION



I. I HISTORICAL SIGNPOSTS

This book is about the Roman Catholic community in England in the decade from 1973 to 1983. It is concerned to explore the state of this community four decades after the Butler Education Act of 1944 and the subsequent expansion of both secondary and further educational opportunities had paved the way for socially and geographically mobile Catholics to escape from the working-class parishes in the inner cities. At the same time it will report the responses of Catholics to the liturgical and social changes resulting from the reforms of the Second Vatican Council which had been held in Rome from 1962 to 1965.

Five years after the end of the Second World War, in 1950, the Catholics of England and Wales had celebrated the centenary of the Apostolic Letter *Universalis Ecclesiae* by which Pope Pius IX restored a full Catholic hierarchy of bishops to England and Wales. The last survivor of the medieval Catholic hierarchy to refuse to take the Oath of Supremacy of Queen Elizabeth I had died in 1585 and until 1850 the small body of Catholics had a variety of religious leaders but no diocesan bishops. The restoration of the hierarchy in 1850 had infuriated the prime minister and public opinion although Cardinal Wiseman substantially defused the situation with his famous *Appeal to the English People* (Albion, 1950).

The celebrations of 1950, which included a massive open-air Mass at Wembley stadium, were triumphant and self-congratulatory. By contrast the Mass celebrated by Pope John Paul II in the same stadium in the course of the historic first visit to Britain, in 1982, by a

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reigning Pope on the vigil of the feast of Pentecost, was pastoral, reflective and challenging in tone. Between these two events the Second Vatican Council, called by Pope John XXIII, had been held in Rome. In the four sessions of the Council the Catholic bishops of the world had endeavoured to reform the Church in order that it might more readily respond to the rapidly changing social and political conditions of the post-war world. The religious teachings of this Council (Abbott, 1966) constituted a radical break, with a 'pre-Vatican' model of the Church. In concrete terms their effect was shortly to be experienced in a series of liturgical changes which aimed to encourage lay participation in the Mass, the central act of worship of the Church, and in the increasing involvement of lay people in advisory structures and decision-making processes at all levels.

The culmination of this process of lay participation was the first open congress involving all the bishops and representative priests, religious men and woman, and lay people from all the dioceses and the main Catholic organisations. The National Pastoral Congress (N.P.C.) which was held in Liverpool in 1980 was a milestone in the life of the Church in this country. Some commentators regarded it as the 'end of adolescence' in the growth to confidence and maturity of English Catholics in the 130 years since the restoration of the hierarchy.

This book aims to bring the disciplines of social research and sociological analysis to bear on this English Catholic community at this important transitional period in its history. It will attempt the interpretation of its processes of adaptation to the social changes in British society in the post-war world and to the religious reforms emanating from the Second Vatican Council. The period of our empirical investigations closes with the visit of the Pope and with evidence, for example, in the much-publicised case of Mgr Bruce Kent, formerly the General Secretary of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, that the Catholic community remains seriously divided on the proper relationship between religion and politics.

It was perhaps inevitable that the visit of Pope John Paul II to Britain in the summer of 1982 should have generated so much interest. It was bound to arouse controversy among those protestants who regarded any hint of papal pretensions with suspicion; other protestants had come to regard the Pope as a world Christian as well as a Catholic leader.

English Catholics, too, had anticipated his visit with a mixture of

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### *Contemporary significance*

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pride and apprehension. They were, perhaps, rather surprised that the Pope was accorded such a warm welcome by their fellow countrymen whom they continued to suspect nurtured a latent hostility towards Catholicism, seeing it as basically 'unEnglish'. Progressive Catholics feared that a conservative Pope would arouse this latent hostility towards a Catholic community which had successfully maintained a low political profile in the previous decade or so. They also suspected that he would reverse some of the trends which had emerged so clearly at the 1980 National Pastoral Congress. The enthusiasm for an 'open' Church engendered by the Congress had led to optimistic expectations which the bishops did not meet in their official response to the N.P.C., *The Easter People* (Anon., 1981). In their disillusionment at the frequently hostile response by priests and laity at the local parish or deanery level, many delegates feared that the Pope's visit would restore a more traditional and authoritarian model of the Church and would alienate many by an aggressive reassertion of official teaching, especially on contraception.

In the event these fears did not materialise and in his homilies (John Paul II, 1982) the Pope referred to many of the themes which had emerged from the N.P.C. On the other hand, critics pointed to the fact that at no stage during his visit did the Pope formally meet any of the key leaders of the Congress nor was any opportunity provided for him to listen to representations from lay leaders. For all the enthusiasm and media attention during the visit, too, there has been little evidence of any significant or long-term impact of the Pope's visit.

#### 1.2 CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE

Granted the general improvement in the circumstances of the English Catholic community, what reasons are there for paying them any special attention? First of all there is the increase in their size (from around 5% in 1850 (Spencer, 1966a) to around 11% in 1978 (Hornsby-Smith and Lee, 1979) and the potential this might have for political or religious mobilisation. The Catholic population has grown considerably in recent decades. From under 40,000 Catholics at the beginning of the seventeenth century and still only 80,000 in 1770, it had grown to around 900,000 at the time of the restoration of the hierarchy of England and Wales in 1850 (Bossy, 1975: 193, 298;

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Currie, Gilbert and Horsley, 1977: 153-5; Spencer, 1966a). In the last 130 years, however, it has increased sixfold to around 5.4 million. A century ago Catholics were still a beleaguered minority fighting for survival in a hostile society. By 1982 the warmth of the reception accorded Pope John Paul II demonstrated clearly that they had largely been accepted as an integral part of British society.

In Cardinal Hume they have a leader who is widely admired and respected. In recent years, too, Catholics have held such posts as Secretary of the Cabinet, leadership of both Houses of Parliament, editor of *The Times*, and General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress. The Earl Marshal is a Catholic. The assimilation of English Catholicism can also be judged from the fact that as many as 1 child in 11 attends a Catholic school where the teachers' salaries and 85% of the grant for capital building are paid for by the State (Hornsby-Smith, 1978a), a fact that is now largely accepted as uncontroversial.

Catholics' religious significance, too, can be judged from the fact that in the late 1970s there were more Roman Catholic adult 'members' than members in all the Protestant Churches in England. More than one-third of adult attenders at church services were Catholics and there were more Catholic Mass attenders than attenders in the established Church of England (Anon. 1980a: 23).

Secondly, they are of considerable social and political importance because they are a community with overwhelmingly immigrant (especially Irish) origins and they represent an important example of assimilation to British society over many generations. At the turn of the century a largely impoverished Irish Catholic working class was concentrated mainly in the inner-city parishes especially in Liverpool and the north-west and in London. Now they are more generally dispersed throughout England and Wales. There has been considerable movement into the industrial midlands and the south-east and, more generally, with rising affluence, a move out of the inner cities and into the suburban estates.

Thirdly, a study of the Roman Catholic community is important not only because of its size and social significance, but also because it provides a valuable opportunity to monitor in some depth the wider issues of religious change and to explore further processes of secularisation in the post-war world. It also enables us to monitor transformations of religious meanings among ordinary members when the boundaries protecting them from the influences of the wider society

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become eroded, not only by social change generally, but also as a result of theological developments or shifts of dominant religious ideologies within the religious collectivity.

In recent years a high proportion of the concern and attention of sociologists of religion has been focussed on the study of sects and new religious movements (Barker, 1982, 1984; Beckford, 1975, 1985; Wallis, 1976, 1982; Wilson, 1970, 1982). While this academic concentration, if not obsession, might be justified in terms of some supposed prototypical characteristics of such developments, it is important to stress that the vast majority of religious adherents remain members of the more established churches and denominations, which are also subject to the same global forces of social change. Their members, too, have to face the same problems of religious meaning and the significance of everyday life in a changing world, and these established churches and denominations are transformed in the process. It is argued here that there is a need for serious sociological investigations of the transformations of the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and other major denominations in the post-war world and it is hoped that this study of these processes of adaptation and adjustment to the new social and religious circumstances by the English Catholics might have relevance, not only comparatively for the Roman Catholic Church in other countries, but also for the other major denominations in England who clearly face the same problems and have the same tensions and conflicts between traditional and progressive groups.

## 1.3 MAJOR THEMES

The problems of continuity and change, consensus and conflict, traditionalism and progressivism for the Roman Catholic Church in England were, then, the starting points for this study in the early 1970s. Who were the English Catholics? How did they differ from their fellow countrymen? Were the barriers which once separated them from 'non-Catholics' breaking down? How homogeneous was the Roman Catholic community? How had it been affected by post-war social and geographical mobility? How distinct were those Catholics with Irish origins? What was happening to Catholic marriages and family life? Who were the dominant elites in the contemporary Church? How had the Catholic parish survived post-war changes? How had the nature of religious authority been

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transformed? Were Catholics seriously concerned to encourage ecumenical developments? To what extent did the traditional defensiveness and 'ghetto' or 'fortress' mentality of English Catholics persist? What political weight did Catholics wield?

Five distinct factors in the changes taking place in English Catholicism were postulated:

- 1 The largely immigrant origin of earlier generations of Catholics, notably unskilled and semi-skilled manual workers from Ireland, but more recently refugees from Eastern Europe. In the early stages these immigrants found security and a sense of identity in a hostile environment largely through their membership of ghetto churches serviced by co-cultural priests.
- 2 Catholics have participated in equal measure with the rest of the population in the massive expansion of secondary, further and higher education provision since the Second World War. In consequence they are now more informed and articulate than ever before and increasingly critical of authority based on traditional rather than legal-rational forms of legitimation.
- 3 With the increasing certification of large numbers of Catholics, there has been a significant amount of upward social mobility. For the first time there is now a sizeable 'new Catholic middle class', assertively self-confident and less deferential towards traditional forms of authority. In this respect, Catholics have participated in the broad process of democratization in industry, universities, schools and homes in the wider society.
- 4 The recent developments in the media have produced revolutionary changes, not only in the speed of mass communications but also in the exposing of authority figures to public scrutiny. This scrutiny concerns not only the cognitive content of communications but also non-verbal and affective aspects.
- 5 For Catholics, the teaching of the Second Vatican Council has had a profound influence in changing the dominant emphases and orientations which make up the normatively prescribed belief and value system.

(Hornsby-Smith and Mansfield, 1974: 62–3)

It was anticipated that the 'new Catholic middle class', upwardly mobile from the working class as a result of the post-war expansion of educational and occupational opportunities, would be central to the outcomes in the tightly structured, rigid and hierarchically organised Church of the 1950s. Tensions and conflicts between those Catholics

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favouring the certainties of the traditional orthodoxies, on the one hand, and those, on the other hand, who felt that their religious beliefs and commitment needed to be expressed in new ways which they claimed were more appropriate to the changing circumstances of the moment, were only to be expected. For example, it was apparent that some of the most successful products of the expanded Catholic system of secondary education were the most articulate critics of the effectiveness and desirability of this system in a plural society (Spencer, 1971). The tensions could be seen, too, in the diminution of the traditional docility and deference to the dominant clerical leadership in England and a corresponding change in the nature of the cohesion of the Roman Catholic community. Conflicts were also manifest in the approach of Catholics to the ecumenical movement and in their reception of the recent changes in the liturgy and the reiteration of the traditional viewpoint on the birth-control issue. However, it was suggested that overt conflict might be avoided by the strategy of reducing the area where the authority and guidance of the Church was thought to be relevant. There were also latent conflicts surrounding the wider social, economic and political issues of justice and peace and the international ramifications of post-colonial capitalism. In all these conflicts the role of the 'new Catholic middle class', subject to the twin pressures towards secularisation in an advanced industrial society, on the one hand, and the attempts to achieve a reform and a renewal of purpose by the Church, on the other hand, was expected to be crucial.

These, then, were the hypotheses, hunches and assumptions with which this programme of research was initially undertaken. They explain why it was that our first studies were of lay members of the bishops' national advisory commissions. If the 'new Catholic middle class' was rising in prominence we anticipated that its members would be found in the new participatory structures. Secondly, we expected they would be found in significant numbers in the expanding London commuter and suburban parishes. A feasibility study in one such parish was later expanded and surveys were subsequently undertaken in four parishes: the original commuter parish and an inner-city parish in the London area and a suburban and an inner-city parish in the Preston area in north-west England. Given limited resources these four parishes were chosen to reflect as far as possible both regional and social-class differences.

As these two studies proceeded, and especially as a result of our

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field-work experiences, some of our initial assumptions were shown to require some modification. Vertical conflicts between priests and lay people, for example, were nothing like as salient as we had at first anticipated. More significant were the horizontal tensions between traditionalists and progressives. Even more important was the growing evidence of a cleavage between the articulate 'activists', largely familiar with the shifts of religious ideology in the Church, and the inarticulate, nominal Catholic, whether 'practising' or not in terms of regular Mass attendance. This led to a shift in the focus of the research (Hornsby-Smith, 1983a). From the testing of hypotheses about social mobility and adaptation to religious change, our in-depth interviews became increasingly tentative and exploratory as we sought to interpret the significance of a Roman Catholic identity as 'common' (Towler, 1974: 145–62) or 'customary' religion (Hornsby-Smith, Lee and Reilly, 1985). These more qualitative data, concerned primarily with the social reality of the religion of English Catholics (Berger and Luckmann, 1971; Berger, 1973) will be reported in a sequel to this present book.

The more quantitative data presented in this volume will indicate the broad structure of beliefs and practices and enable us to specify some of the parameters for the subsequent interpretation of the more in-depth interview material. In particular we will be able to draw on the data from the 1978 survey of a nationally representative sample of Catholics in England and Wales (Hornsby-Smith and Lee, 1979) in order to identify a number of distinct types of English Catholics (Hornsby-Smith, Lee and Turcan, 1982).

One of the limitations of the 1978 survey was that it did not permit the detailed examination of the nature of Catholic 'traditionalism' and 'progressivism', nor was it possible to construct adequate measures of a 'post-Vatican' theological orientation on the basis of the questions asked. A survey of the delegates to the N.P.C. (Hornsby-Smith and Cordingley, 1983) provided the opportunity to pursue these matters further, at least with a national sample of Catholic 'activists'. Finally, the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1982 led to a piece of opportunistic research (Hornsby-Smith, Brown and O'Byrne, 1983) and the further exploration of people's attitudes to papal authority. The occasion also provided a favourable opportunity to check some of the conclusions of the various researches over the previous eight or nine years.

It can be seen, therefore, that the research programme reported in



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### *Data sources*

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this book has been a dynamic process. The questions which informed the initial studies of lay activists and the four parishes led to new research questions. The resources needed for a national survey were not available at the beginning of our work but once undertaken answered many questions about Catholic schooling, marriage patterns, the heterogeneity of belief and practice, and so on, but in turn raised other issues, notably about the nature of progressivism and in particular Catholic attitudes and behaviour in the politically sensitive areas of justice and peace. Following this, two opportunistic pieces of research in connection with the N.P.C. and the subsequent visit of the Pope, enabled more fundamental questions about the coherence and compliance of Catholics within the socio-religious community with its changing authority structures to be addressed more directly.

#### 1.4 DATA SOURCES

A summary of data sources in the five studies has been given in table 1.1. It has already been stressed that the starting point for the present research was the 'new Catholic middle class' which was thought to have emerged in the affluent post-war years especially as a result of the general expansion of secondary and higher education provision. In a feasibility study funded by the British Social Science Research Council (S.S.R.C.), tape-recorded focussed interviews, on average two hours long, were obtained from 71 of the 83 lay members of five of the bishops' national advisory commissions in 1974–5. In these interviews four areas were investigated: the social and religious background of the respondent, his/her religious beliefs, views on recent changes in the Church, and observations on the work of the commissions. In a postal survey of the 68 lay members of the remaining commissions and listed advisory bodies, including the Catholic Education Council, 39 completed schedules were returned. Overall, therefore, data were obtained from 110 of the 151 lay members of the national Catholic advisory bodies, a net response rate of 75%, allowing for death and other serious reasons.

A study of a parish in the outer London commuter belt was subsequently extended in a second S.S.R.C. funded project 'Tradition and Change in the Roman Catholic Community in England' from 1975–7. In all four parishes were studied: an inner-London parish and a commuter parish about 20 miles from the centre of

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Research stage	Years	Respondents	Research Instrument	Number	Length (av. hours)	Net response rate %
1. Commissions	1974-5	Lay members	Focussed interviews	71	2	88
			Postal questionnaires	39	na	57
2. Parishes (a) Stage I  (b) Stage II	1974-7	Non-Catholic electors	Structured interviews	1164	3/4	60
			Catholic electors	266		
		Catholic activists	84	3/4	94	
		Catholic electors	183	1/2-2	84	
		Catholic activists	77	2	92	
		Priests	15	1/2-2	100	
3. National survey National Gallup omnibus	1978	Adult Catholics	Structured Interviews	1023	1 1/4	
	1978	Non-Catholics	Structured interviews	8915	na	
	1978	Catholics	Structured interviews	1150	na	
4. National Pastoral Congress	1981	Delegates (other than bishops)	Postal questionnaires	1276	na	65
5. Pope's visit	1982	Attenders at public events	Structured interviews	194	under 1/4	
	1982	Catholic attenders (after 4 months)	Postal questionnaires	120	na	72

London and an inner-city parish and a suburban parish in Preston, Lancashire. In each parish random samples of electors were selected using sampling fractions adjusted to achieve around 60 Roman Catholic electors. In addition, in each parish, around 20 parishioners identified by parish priests as being actively involved in the life