

**NOTRE DAME STUDY OF CATHOLIC PARISH LIFE**

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**A PROFILE OF  
AMERICAN CATHOLIC PARISHES  
AND PARISHIONERS:  
1820s TO THE 1980s**

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### ***Introduction: A Variety of Parish Pasts***

Every social institution has a history. The parish is no exception. Under the guidance of the Spirit of God, each parish is today also the end result of many social forces, stimulating and nourishing each other. To understand parishes we cannot simply take a slice of current time. Memory is short. There is a tendency to recall the past selectively so that it is consistent with the present. Thus, the methods of both sociology and history must be merged to understand American Catholic parishes twenty years after Vatican II.

Parishes are products of the larger society in which they are embedded. An ecclesiastical history that focuses on church leaders, while valuable, takes us only part way in the understanding of parishes. We must write history from the bottom up as well as from the top down. We look at American parishes, partly as the product of internal church forces, but heavily as the product of broader social forces operating throughout American history.

The Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life is based on surveys of 1100 parishes, intensive analyses of pastors, staff, volunteer leaders, and ordinary parishioners in 36 carefully selected parishes, and observation of liturgies in those parishes.

Another major component of the Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life was the writing of a history of the parish since the middle of the nineteenth century. This history had a special twist. It was divided geographically into six different regions of the country. Each region was assigned its own historian who would research and write the history of the development of the parish within that geographic region. The benefit of such an approach is the ability to compare the development of the parish in different geographical regions of the U.S. Such comparisons were made possible because each historian followed the same thematic outline in writing his or her regional history. They studied parish locales, size, ethnicity, role of laity, clerical leadership, organizational complexity, popular pieties, religious socialization and education, and ecumenism. The six historians, selected after a national search, have completed their work. Their manuscripts, each about 200 pages in length, will soon be published and made available to the public.

History continually reminds us of the reality of change in our lives and in our cultures. The historical study of Catholic parishes teaches us the same lesson. In the U.S. there has never been one typical parish that has dominated the landscape during the course of the last 200 years. St. Peter's parish in New York City, founded in 1785, has served a variety of communities throughout its two hundred year history. Though the building has stood on the same spot for nearly two centuries, the nature and style of parish life has changed with the changing times. The same is true of Indian mission churches in New

Mexico, Arizona, and California. Founded in the eighteenth century, many of these mission communities are still functioning but the parishioners have changed and so too have their respective environments.

### *The Early Nineteenth Century Parish*

In the early nineteenth century a distinctive type of parish did exist in Northeastern United States where the bulk of Americans and Catholics lived. Since in many instances the people had preceded the priest, leadership in the parish initially fell upon the shoulders of laymen. Once the priest arrived, people and priest had to learn to work together for the benefit of all. A system of governance, common in American Protestant churches and in some European countries, was worked out whereby laymen, elected by the people, worked with the priest in managing the affairs of the parish. Called trustees, these laymen were the recognized leaders in the parish and had a very strong voice in church affairs. History has not been kind to this tradition in American Catholicism and has wrongly depicted the trustee system and lay trustees as detrimental to Catholic life. Though the system certainly had some problems because of irascible laymen and authoritarian priests, it worked remarkably well in numerous parish communities where, in the words of Bishop John England of Charleston, South Carolina, "The laity are empowered to cooperate but not to dominate." In a sense, the post-Vatican II American church is now returning to its lay roots.

The early nineteenth century parish also had a distinctive style of liturgy or worship. In these early years the liturgy was noted for its plainness. The interior of churches was spartan with few, if any, of the decorative statues or paintings that were so common in European churches. The practice of religion centered around Sunday, with the celebration of morning Mass, afternoon vespers and benediction comprising the core of Catholic devotional life. During this era religious education took place in an informal manner with the home being the principal setting. Only a few urban parishes were able to establish a school.

### *The Immigrant Church*

By 1900 the Catholic parish had changed dramatically. In the intervening years millions of Catholic immigrants from Ireland, Germany, Italy, Poland, and other Eastern European countries had arrived in the U.S. Attracted to this country by an expanding economy, they provided the muscle that enabled industrial America to prosper. By 1900 the Church in the U.S. had become a church of the immigrants. It was a blue-collar church centered in the working class neighborhoods of urban America. More than 70% of the U.S. population lived in the economic heartland of the nation, a region that stretched from the Atlantic Seaboard to the Mississippi River and was bordered on the south by the Ohio River Valley. The Southeast was still missionary country as were parts of the rural West.

### *The Pastor and Lay Leadership*

In the immigrant neighborhoods the parish was a central community institution. Most often organized according to language or nationality, it gave the newcomers a sense of identity in a strange new world. Since the people generally arrived before the priest, they took an active role in the initial stages of organizing the parish. Most groups adopted some form of trustee government but the clergy and hierarchy did not look kindly on such lay involvement in the governance of the local church. As the numbers of clergy increased and the institutional church became better organized with the establishment of numerous dioceses, bishops and pastors assumed control of the local church and the laity were left to "pay, pray, and obey" as one pundit put it. With the demise of lay leadership in the parish, the focal point of the people's involvement shifted especially to the devotional arena but also to the benevolence societies.

### *Liturgy and Devotions*

Throughout the Catholic world a devotional revolution had taken place in the second half of the nineteenth century. Promoted by the papacy and the hierarchy, it was received with enthusiasm by most of the American Catholic community. Gone was the plainness of the early nineteenth century and in its place was an elaborate network of devotions, both public and private. Churches were decorated with numerous statues and paintings depicting favorite local saints. Traveling revivalists or mission preachers promoted this devotional Catholicism and parish confraternities, organized around a particular devotion, sustained the people's interest. Some immigrant groups promoted their own unique traditions, like the Italian *festa* and the Mexican passion play.

### *Religious Education and Parochial Schools*

Devotional Catholicism and the devotional parish were central ingredients in defining American Catholic identity at the neighborhood level. Another key element in defining this identity was the parochial school. Born in the midst of large-scale immigration and at a time when the public schools were still Protestant institutions, the parochial school had become widely accepted by the end of the nineteenth century. About forty percent of the parishes had such a school at that time. A major reason for the extraordinary growth of the Catholic school was the availability of a large pool of teachers who were willing to work at less than subsistence wages. These were, of course, the women religious, who along with a much smaller number of religious brothers, comprised the teaching staff of the Catholic schools. To illustrate the commitment of the parish to the school, Joseph Casino, the historian who wrote our regional history of the parish in the Northeast, examined parish financial records and discovered that in 1900 as much as fifty percent of the entire parish budget went to support the parish school. Parishes in other regions of the country made similar financial commitments to the school.

At this time the parish school was the primary religious educator in the Catholic community. For those children who did not attend parochial schools – and that represented well over half the school-age population – the home and the family remained

the primary religious educator. In that day and age catechism classes were neither well organized nor terribly effective.

### ***Transition into the Middle of the Twentieth Century***

During the first half of the twentieth century little change took place in the parish in terms of leadership, liturgy, and religious education. The pastor was still very much a reigning monarch and longer tenures for pastors tended to strengthen their position. Devotional Catholicism flourished, as novenas and missions became the most popular expressions of the people's piety. Parochial schools increased in number and, though they never reached more than half of the school-age population, they still remained one of the distinctive features of the immigrant church into the first half of the twentieth century. In the Southeast the Catholic Church was beginning to develop a more visible presence. The same was evident in the Far West. It was a boom time for American Catholicism as new parish churches, schools, and other institutions began to rise up across the landscape. Such extensive building taxed the financial resources of most parishes and huge debts became standard. To raise more money the Sunday envelope system was introduced and bazaars, raffles, and other fund raising events became an integral part of parish life. Benevolence societies, such as St. Vincent de Paul, continued to deal with the problems of the less fortunate.

### ***New Immigration Patterns and the Move to the Suburbs***

Major social changes took place during these decades and they were destined to change decisively the American Catholic landscape. One major change was the end of immigration from Europe; new laws passed by Congress in the 1920s stopped the flow of immigration and, for the first time in over a century, European immigrants would no longer dominate the agenda of the church. Nonetheless, a new immigration developed north from Mexico and this flow of immigrants would soon pose serious challenges for the local church. Another equally important challenge was the migration north of numerous Black Americans. As these new immigrants settled in the inner cities where the old immigrants lived, the city began to expand outward to the crabgrass frontier of the suburb. Many Catholics followed this movement to the suburbs and new parishes began to spring up in these areas.

### ***Social Justice***

By the 1940s it was clear that, as a group, Catholics were becoming more middle class and increasingly more American and less European. This pattern of development was truer of the older immigrant groups like the Germans and the Irish than it was of the more recent arrivals like the Italians and the Polish.

Another change that would have a profound effect on the future of Catholicism was an awakening within the community of a concern for justice. This concern first surfaced in late nineteenth century America but never pervaded the Catholic community to any significant degree. The depression of the 1930s and the social encyclicals of the popes changed that. Both clergy and lay people became intensely interested in the issues of social justice and, though this movement was independent of the local parish, the effects of this new consciousness would eventually leave their mark on the parish. In addition to the concern for justice came a new theology of the church. Called the theology of the mystical body, it inspired many lay people to become more committed to the mission of the church in the world.

These changes, both social and theological, were for the most part glacial movements whose effects would not be widely felt for some time. While these changes were occurring, the parish remained intact and seemingly immune to change. Joseph Fichter's study of a Southern parish in the late 1940s revealed a parish that was in many respects not very different from its 1900s predecessor.

### *The Contemporary Parish*

The parish of the 1980s, however, is quite different from its early nineteenth century predecessor as well as its 1900s counterpart. The Catholic population has changed significantly in the last quarter century. Catholics resemble the rest of the American population in terms of birthplace, class, and education. Though the majority of them still live in the economic heartland of the nation in that region that stretches from the Atlantic coast to the Mississippi north of the Ohio River Valley, many now live in the suburbs rather than the nation's central cities. This means that the suburban parish is replacing the urban neighborhood parish as the normative experience for a plurality of Catholics. Gone is the public nature of city neighborhood living and in its place is the more privatized life-style of the suburb. Left behind in this move to the new world of the suburb were many of the traditions of immigrant, folk Catholicism.

### *The Newest Immigrants and the Old Leaders*

The newest immigrants, the vast majority of whom are Spanish-speaking newcomers from Mexico and other Latin American countries, reside in the nation's central cities, often in the same buildings once inhabited by Italian, Polish, Irish, and Slovak Catholics. Their numbers have increased so greatly in the last twenty five years that in many areas of the country-Florida and California being two good examples-they comprise better than half of the Catholic population. In the Far West immigrants from Asian countries give the church a decidedly Oriental cast. The large numbers of new Catholic immigrants from Asia and Latin America have once again given the American church a pronounced multi-cultural quality. But instead of being multi-cultural European, the American church is becoming multi-cultural in a global manner.

In the nineteenth century the mainstream of American Catholicism was made up of foreign-born immigrants; along the margins of the community was a small, but powerful middle class. Today the mainstream is comprised of middle-class Catholics who are culturally very American. From this group come the decision-makers and the power-brokers. On the margin of the community in terms of influence are the new immigrants who, as has been noted, make up the majority of the Catholic population in some regions. It is not unlike the situation in the nineteenth century when the Irish, for a variety of reasons, dominated the seats of power in the church and forced it over other immigrant groups who, in many communities, outnumbered the people from Erin. The scars this left among immigrant communities are still visible today. How the contemporary situation is resolved in terms of meeting the cultural needs of the new immigrants is a critical question that today's Catholic leadership must face.

### *The Second Vatican Council and the American Social Revolutions*

Of course another major influence on the parish of the 1980s was the Second Vatican Council. Its articulation of a new theology of the church, of a new understanding of the use of authority in the church, and the sponsorship of a new liturgy have had a tremendous impact on parish life in the last quarter century.

The social revolutions of post-War II America also placed a heavy burden on the parish. The linking of better education to better job opportunities, the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, the nuclear arms race, the peace movement, instantaneous telecommunications that bring the plight of the underdeveloped world into our living rooms, new employment opportunities outside the home and increased educational opportunities for women, policy dissatisfaction and the questioning of traditional authority—all had an impact on Catholic Americans. For many younger Catholics, their hopes and dreams were uplifted by a young Catholic President, but expectations unmet only led to further disillusionment with the upheavals of the 1960s and the malaise of the 1970s. At precisely that time in American history, the Catholic Church was trying to welcome reform, to sift the good from the bad.

### *Parish Leadership*

Given the scope of the social and religious changes of the last quarter century, it is not surprising to discover that the parish of the 1980s differs from its predecessors. One area of comparison is parish leadership. For a number of reasons, both theological and sociological, lay people are much more involved in parish decision-making. A common form of this participation is through the parish council. Such lay participation is quite different from the early twentieth century when the clergy still acted alone. Nonetheless, not all parishes have adopted this type of church government. In Florida, for example, only about one-third of the parishes in the Miami archdiocese have a parish council. By contrast, every parish in the Savannah, Georgia diocese has a parish council according to Michael McNally, who wrote our regional history of the parish in the Southeast. Of course, having a parish council does not mean that democracy reigns in the American

Catholic church. Far from it. Nevertheless, this is a very important development in parish life. In some areas of the country this development is especially important because of the large number of parish communities without a priest in residence. Such is the case in many locales of the Rocky Mountains and inter-mountain regions.

Of course there are other areas of parish life where leadership styles have changed dramatically since 1900. One that quickly comes to mind is the liturgy. Many parishes have formed liturgical committees made up of priests, women religious and lay people. Rather than just one person-the priest-being responsible for the liturgy, a group of people now take an active role in planning parish liturgies. The same development has taken place in the area of religious education, youth work, and financial affairs. The ubiquitous committee form of decision-making has replaced the one-person rule of days past. In fact, parish consultation has become a cottage industry in the American Catholic community. Even though lay persons may not have the impact they seek through parish councils, they have discovered that by doing the many ministries of the parish, they can have a pervasive effect on the life of the parish.

### *Patterns of Piety*

Just as the style of leadership has changed, so too, have the patterns of piety. What Flannery O'Connor called the "novena-rosary" style of religion has undergone a dramatic decline. Gone is the elaborate network of devotional Catholicism with its statues, medals, scapulars, novenas, and parish revivals, and in its place have come biblically-oriented meditation booklets, public penitential services, prayer groups and parish mission statements. Undoubtedly the most visible indicator of this change in Catholics' devotional or spiritual lives is the variety of Sunday liturgies or Masses in the parish. The longing for order, so central a feature of the church in the immigrant era, has given way to a longing for pluralism, not just in theology but in popular piety as well. In days past different styles of piety were associated with different immigrant groups. A trip inside a Polish church left a decidedly different impression than a visit to a church in an Irish neighborhood. Today within the same parish community, a visitor can observe quite different styles of liturgies that are indicative of very diverse patterns of piety. The 8:00 Mass is often strikingly different from the 10:30 Mass. It is almost as though there are different congregations within the same parish.

One of the most dramatic changes in Catholic piety is the popularity of charismatic religion. The charismatic movement swept through the church in the 1970s and has revitalized the religion of thousands of American Catholics. Today, Catholic charismatics have become an integral part of many parish communities and their style of piety has won acceptance from other Catholics after a long period of suspicion. Spiritual renewal, whether charismatic or not, is indeed a powerful force in parishes. For individuals it may come from Cursillo week-ends; for entire parishes it may result, for example, from the RENEW program. Marriage Encounter may not only enrich a marriage but lead a couple to see God in a new light. Many parishes attribute their new sense of purpose and vitality to the Holy Spirit.

### *Decline in Schools*

No one needs to be told about the decline in the number of Catholic schools. This has been trumpeted for several years. But how great has this decline been? One way of answering this question is to look at statistics from specific regions and what emerges is quite striking. Put simply, in most areas of the country, there were more parochial schools in operation in 1930 than in 1980. In Oregon, for example, fifty-four Catholic parochial schools were operating in 1930; in 1980 the number was fifty-one. In Massachusetts the 1930 figure was 275 and the 1980 number was 218. In other words, after fifty years of substantial growth in the young Catholic population, the number of Catholic schools in some regions has actually declined. In the intervening years there was a large expansion in the number of schools but then came the subsequent contraction of the past two decades. This decline is most visible in the suburbs, where many parishes have chosen not to invest in schools.

### *Decline in Vocations*

Comparing the number of clergy and the number of women religious in 1930 in some regions with 1980 figures reveals similar results: the number of Catholics has increased but the number of church personnel is not much different than that of fifty years ago. Such comparisons suggest that nowadays American Catholicism is less institutionally developed than it was fifty years ago. The implications of this remain to be seen, but it is no coincidence that dioceses now devote substantial staff resources to workshops and training programs for the laity.

### *Changing Emphases in Religious Education*

The decline in Catholic schools has changed the thrust of religious education in the parish. In an unprecedented manner adult education has moved to the forefront of the parochial educational commitment, and in any given season most Catholic parishes offer a variety of religious education programs for adults. More so than in the immigrant church, the family has become involved in the religious education of children, even in parishes that still have a parochial school. Because of the decline in the number of women religious, more lay people are becoming involved in the teaching apostolate both as volunteers and as paid personnel. The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) is a major avenue for teaching ministry, especially among mothers in the parish.

### *The Pace of Parish Change*

The changes in parish life are obvious to any middle-aged Catholic — Mass in English, lay people reading the scriptures at Mass, women religious working in the parish not as parochial school teachers but as pastoral associates, directors of religious education or social action programs, popular election of parish councils, and lay people distributing the Eucharist. It is equally obvious that not all parishes have changed with the same

measure of conviction. In fact many have resisted the movement for change in the areas of leadership, liturgy, and education. Some parishes are like volleyballs: diocesan assignment of a new pastor leads to the dismantling of liturgical or programmatic changes just as the parish is finally adjusting to those changes introduced by the previous pastor four years earlier. Now that lay volunteers are deeply involved in parish liturgies and ministries, the laity is especially sensitive to the directions a parish takes as the result of a bishop's assignment of priests. Whatever the outcomes, it is clear that the parish of the future will more resemble the parish of the 1980s than its counterpart in the 1940s and 50s. The reason for this is plain.

The forces of change are too powerful and too deeply rooted to be ignored or sidestepped. The Catholic parish of the nineteenth century could not resist adapting to the social forces of immigration and urbanization. If it did it would have become an anachronism. Nor could it resist the devotional revolution that swept through the Roman Catholic world. Today much the same is true. The social implications of suburbanization are too widespread and too powerful to ignore: as a group, Catholics are economically better off today than they were fifty years ago, they are better educated and consequently expect more from their local church, women religious are better educated and seek more challenges in a variety of ministries, the education and professionalization of lay women has freed up a powerful force in the local church, and the demands and needs of the new immigrants are different from mainstream Catholics. To be a living force in society the church will have to adapt itself to this changing social environment.

### *A People of God*

There have also been changes in the deepest religious values. Once the Second Vatican Council sanctified the principle of participation of the people in the liturgy, the celebrations of Mass and the sacraments were destined to change. The moment the Council defined the Church as the people of God, a change in thinking took place and eventually a change in acting as well. The concept of shared responsibility entered into church life and with it came shared decision-making. These changes have been developing for close to twenty years and in ways most likely not envisioned by the bishops at the Council. History is like that. No one can predict the future, but release a powerful agent for change in a society undergoing rapid transformation and the future is unlikely to imitate the past.

### *A Social Profile of American Catholics in the 1980s*

History presents broad, interpretive brush strokes of the past. It offers insights and understanding of the forces and movements that led to the current conditions of a people. Sociology, done well, offers a clear and accurate picture of the present. Therefore, to examine Catholic parish life in the United States twenty years after Vatican II, we must look at photographs of American Catholics. In the language of sociology, what are their "demographic profiles?" Where do Catholics fit in the American social structure of the

1980s? How are American Catholics different or similar to other Christian bodies within American Protestantism? For answers to these questions we turn to surveys of the adult American population.

One of the most useful resources for a demographic profile of American Catholics is the General Social Survey (GSS) conducted by the National Opinion Research Center, whose headquarters are at the University of Chicago. Biennially, often annually, the GSS is addressed to a scientific sample of approximately 1500 adults. The resulting data are available on computer tapes and have been accepted by the social science community as quite reliable. Scholars such as Andrew Greeley, William McCready, and their students have written important works about Catholics from these surveys.

When the data from several years hand-running are similar, it is permissible to "pool" the data so that larger samples of people with certain characteristics are available for analysis. That is what we have done with GSS years 1982, 1983, and 1984. This gives us a sample of 1213 people who claim to be Catholics and 3160 people who claim to be Protestants, from which we will draw a current demographic profile. Occasionally we will also compare this profile to the characteristics of Catholics located in the 36 representative parishes nationwide where we conducted our intensive studies during the same time period.

The General Social Survey data are usually appropriate for generalizing about Catholics in the aggregate. Data from the Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life, on the other hand, are even more useful for understanding Catholics within their parishes. People never exist in isolation but their values and behaviors are shaped by social organizations and, in turn, they help shape these organizations. Both exist within the larger cultural values, trends, and movements of American social life. We need to reiterate that our sample of parishioners does not yield an accurate picture of all Catholics in the U.S. Instead it offers an accurate picture of those Catholics *known to parishes* and *served by them*. The Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life addresses core Catholics. The GSS, on the other hand, includes Catholics who, for a variety of reasons, seldom connect with the parish. Since we are trying to describe *all* Catholics in this particular report, even "the unchurched," we are turning to the GSS data. Future reports will continue to make distinctions between these two kinds of data.

### *Church Attendance*

When we compare the U.S. Catholic population with the U.S. Protestant population, we find that Catholics attend religious services more frequently than Protestants. In curious ways, however, the gap is not so large as conventional wisdom suggests. About twenty-seven percent of adult Catholics attend services once a year or never, and about thirty percent of adult Protestants are in the same category. At the other end of the attendance spectrum, about 44% of Catholics claim to be regular attenders (weekly or almost weekly) and 38% of Protestants have similar attendance patterns. The rest are somewhere in between.

Church attendance patterns differ by sex. Of those who claim to be Catholic, 57% are women, while among Protestants, 60% are women. Among regular attenders, 63% of the Catholics are women and 67% of the Protestants are women. Among those who attend additional services during the week, however, 81% of the Catholics are women but only 67% of the Protestants are women. This is a curious anomaly. Protestant men perhaps are more accustomed to prayer breakfasts or Wednesday evening services followed by Bible class or council meetings. Catholics, on the other hand, tend to hold weekday masses in the morning or late afternoon when more women and fewer men are available. Thus, both tradition and convenience may effect male/female patterns in religious practices.

### *Age*

Age also shows curious differences and similarities. The average age of adult Catholics is 42.6 years. The average age of adult Protestants is considerably greater, 46 years. Our intensive study of the 36 parishes shows that the "core," or most highly active adult Catholics, are even older than this, an average of 49.3 years. Certainly until a person reaches the declining years, religious practices within the context of a church or parish increase with age. Younger people, Catholic and Protestant alike, are less likely to establish themselves in a parish or church. With the onset of family life and children, parish ties are more likely to be established.

### *Change from One Denomination to Another*

There are different patterns of mobility from one denominational body to another. Among current Protestants, 94% were raised as Protestants and 4% were raised as Catholics. Among current Catholics, 90% were raised as Catholics and 9% had been Protestants. Many observers point to marriage as a time when families and their churches seek religious homogeneity. Indeed many people do change religious affiliation at that point, but the pattern is hardly uniform.

Current Catholics are far more likely to live within "mixed marriages" than are Protestants. 79% of married Catholics are married to Catholics and 17% are married to Protestants. Among married Protestants, however, 89% are married to Protestants and 7% are married to Catholics. (This figure, of course, masks denominational differences among Protestants.) Even among the core Catholics in our Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life, 80% of married Catholics are married to Catholics, 13% to Protestants, and 7% of spouses have no denominational affiliation.

There are clear generational differences in the likelihood that a spouse will change religious affiliation. Among Catholics in couples over age 50, about 14% have a Protestant spouse. As one moves downward to couples now in their 40s, 30s, or 20s, the presence of a Protestant spouse rises to 16%, 21% and 28% respectively. We cannot say from these data whether the Protestant spouse will change affiliation through time, although it seems

unlikely since many of these younger couples are already into child-rearing. The post-Vatican II appreciation for other Christian bodies, American cultural values of assimilation and tolerance, and local parish ecumenism have probably all contributed to the greater incidence of "mixed marriages" among younger Catholic couples.

### *Marital Patterns and "Singles"*

Protestants and Catholics are virtually alike in that 57% of the former and 58% of the latter are currently married. A higher proportion of Catholics never married or have not yet married, 22% to 14% for Protestants. A higher proportion of Protestants are widowed, 13%, compared to 9% for Catholics. And contrary to popular impressions, both Protestants and Catholics now have almost similar divorce and separation figures; 13% of Catholics are currently divorced or separated and 15% of Protestants are similarly situated. Among the core Catholics in our parish samples we find slightly less instance of marital dissolution — 5% are divorced and remain single, 4% were divorced but have remarried, and 1% are currently separated. Policy and pastoral ministry toward marital dissolution and reconstitution have become serious concerns in both our sample parishes and their dioceses.

The pastoral issue is even larger than marital dissolution. An important fact of life in the 1980s is that a sizable proportion of the adult American population is legally single. Among Catholics, that figure is somewhere between 31% and 44%, depending on whether divorced persons have remarried. While singles do not necessarily live alone, they may not be well served by ministries built around the family (i.e., husband-wife-children) as the central parish unit. "Singleness" includes a wide variety of conditions from a partial family to isolation. Effective ministries for the many different kinds of singles are among the most crucial problems American parishes face in the 1980s. And a disproportionate number of the young singles in America are Catholics: while 41% of Protestants under age 30 have not yet married, 57% of Catholics under age 30 have not yet married.

### *Ethnicity*

The European roots of the American Catholic Church are still present, if under the surface. Over half of all adult Catholics trace their ancestry to four countries: Italy, Ireland, Germany, and Poland, in that order. There are other Eastern European, French, and English presences in the American church, but the data begin to document growing Mexican, Puerto Rican, and other Hispanic groups, particularly in the rural and urban Southwest and Southeast and the rust belt cities east of the Mississippi and north of the Ohio. Some claim that 25% of American Catholics are Hispanic, but this is difficult to document through surveys addressed to adults. Hispanics, like Black males, are more likely to be overlooked by survey-taking techniques, and Hispanic populations are on the average much younger than other Catholic ethnic groups. By the 1980s a noticeably growing number of Catholic elementary and secondary schools had enrolled more minority children (i.e., Hispanics, Blacks, Asians) than children from traditional Catholic European

ethnic groups. While the proportion is also growing, slightly less than 3% of U.S. Catholics are black.

### *Family Size*

"Everyone knows Catholics have larger families than Protestant" Wrong, almost. When Hispanics are excluded from the current Catholic population, the average ever-married Catholic has 2.44 children and the average ever-married Protestant has 2.40 children, a modest difference indeed. There are substantial differences, however, in Catholic and Protestant generations. While Catholics now in their 70s or 80s had slightly more children than Protestants, Protestants in their 60s had somewhat more children than Catholics. The pattern was again reversed, with Catholics now in their 50s and 40s having had considerably larger families than Protestants. Now however, the youngest married Catholics, those in their 30s and 20s, have fewer children than Protestants. Curiously, the children of the earlier Catholic baby-boom generation — the young Catholics — have married later than Protestants in the same age group and have thus far had fewer children, once married. Thus, hidden behind the near parity in family size is a twenty year cycle where Catholics and Protestants alternate in having larger families. Whereas the norm for parents in their 40s, 50s, and 60s was three children, the norm is now closer to 2 children. Consistently, those who have married in their teens, Catholic or Protestant, have had the most children, and those who married later have had fewer.

### *Cities, Suburbanization, and Countryside*

The suburbanization phenomenon among Catholics also requires a closer look. If Hispanics are included (even the disproportionately few reached in surveys) the percentage of Catholics who reside in the large and medium-sized cities is virtually identical to those who reside in the suburbs, 29% apiece. Yet behind these figures is a curious mosaic — 19% of adult Catholics reside in the largest cities, 22% are in their suburbs, 11% are in medium-sized cities of 50,000 to 250,000, 7% are in their suburbs, 6% are in small cities, and the remainder are in outlying and rural areas and villages. Thus, over a third of all adult Catholics are in smaller city, town, and rural parishes. When one considers that about 52,000,000 Americans are estimated to be Catholics, in actual number non-urban Catholics would constitute a church body rivaling in size Baptists or Methodists, and would be much larger than Lutherans, Presbyterians, or Episcopalians. The numbers of urban and suburban Catholics, however, remain very large.

Even the stereotype of WASP' suburbs is hardly accurate. Comparing the urban-rural distributions of Catholics and Protestants, 9% more of the Catholics live in suburbs than of the Protestants. But Protestants are much more likely to live in the small towns and open country.

There is little difference among age cohorts and suburbanization of Catholics. Higher proportions of Catholics live in the suburbs than in the central city among all age groups—the young, those raising families, and the elderly. Where age differences do appear

is in the smaller towns and the rural areas where older Catholics outnumber younger people.

The center of gravity for Catholics continues to tilt toward the Northeast, whereas for Protestants it tilts South. 59% of Catholics are in New England, Middle Atlantic, or East North Central states. 42% of Protestants are in South Atlantic, East or West South Central states. Each decade, however, sees continual growth of the proportion of Catholics living outside the Northeast.

### *Political Values*

Much has been made in the popular press of the changing political values of Catholics. As the country has shifted to the right, Catholics have participated in that shift. Nevertheless, while only 1% more Catholics are likely to call themselves liberals, about 6% more Protestants are likely to call themselves conservatives. Still the proportion of Catholics who lean conservative is slightly more than those who lean liberal. While 5% more Catholics claim to be Democrats, 9% more Protestants say they are Republicans. The party gap, however, has narrowed 6% in the last half decade. It comes as no surprise that Republican conservatives have managed favorable vote yields among conservative Democratic Catholics in recent years.

### *Education, Income, and Class*

Catholic entry into the mainstream of American society is also shown in comparisons of education, income, and social class. While some scholars have placed non-Hispanic Catholics, once economic underdogs, at the top of the economic pecking order, the General Social Surveys for the 1980s show Jews or Episcopalians alternating as first or second in average family income, Presbyterians third, Catholics fourth, Methodists fifth, Lutherans sixth, and Baptists seventh, among the larger religious bodies. Although one might expect the Catholic income figure to be lower because the Catholic population is younger and has not reached its highest income-producing potential, ironically the average family income of young Catholics under age 30 is substantially higher than among young Protestants. And the income differential has not resulted from two incomes, since the young Catholics are disproportionately single. If current income of the young is a predictor, we should expect upward income mobility among Catholics in future decades.

The rank-orders for years of education completed and one's own perception of social class standing are very close to the income distribution. Although in the 1960s and 1970s Catholics showed higher educational mobility than any other group (that is, their years of education far exceed their parents' formal education), there is some evidence from the last half decade that members of most religious bodies are proceeding upward at a similar pace.

Given this composite demographic profile of adult Catholics in the United States in the 1980s, it is hardly surprising that Catholics increasingly populate the boardrooms of

large corporations and the policy-making councils of White House and Capitol Hill. Catholics, with the exceptions of the "newer" ethnic groups — Hispanics, Asians — are in the mainstream of American life. The people who participate in or are touched by the ministries of Catholic parishes are not too distinguishable from Protestant Americans — with all their strengths and weaknesses. The Catholic Church in this country will face the struggle for the minds and hearts of the people that Protestant churches face — whether it be in uplifting liturgies, effective socialization, or transforming social ethics. For all the triumphs and tragedies that it signals, the profiles of its peoples tell us that Roman Catholicism in the 1980s is another mainstream church in the United States.

Report 3 in this series will examine the expectations Catholics have of their parishes and document their patterns of participation. If, as the historians tell us, it is a people's church—a people of God—then we can expect that the people will not only want many ministries but will expect to participate in meaningful ways. If it is a pluralist church, we would not expect to find enforced uniformity. And if the demographic profile of its people is very much like other Americans, we can expect its practices and priorities to be increasingly American rather than European. For good or for ill, that is what happens when religion and culture interact. If religion is both a model *for* and *of* reality, then our parishes both *shape* and *mirror* us.

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