
LESLIE J. FRANCIS

Welsh National Centre for Religious Education

Abstract
This study employs data from a survey of 33,982 adolescents between the ages of 13-15 throughout England and Wales to profile the distinctive identity of pupils attending Catholic secondary schools within the state maintained sector. Attention is drawn to four distinct communities of values within the Catholic school as defined by pupils who are active Catholics, sliding Catholics, lapsed Catholics and non-Catholics.

INTRODUCTION


Within this broader international context, over the last four decades several independent initiatives have been taken to profile the attitudes, values and beliefs of past and present pupils attending Catholic schools in England and Wales, where the provisions of the 1944 Education Act enabled
the Catholic Church to consolidate and to expand a system of primary and secondary schools within the state maintained educational sector (Cruickshank, 1963; Murphy, 1971; Chadwick, 1997). Four main strands can be identified within these research initiatives.

The first strand brings together three studies conducted and published during the 1960s by Brothers (1964), Lawlor (1965) and Spencer (1968). Brothers’ (1964) pioneering study was designed to find out the relationships which the former pupils of 9 Catholic grammar schools, where the head-teachers were all members of religious orders, had with the formal groupings of the church. Her data demonstrated that the parish had become largely irrelevant to many of these former pupils. Their education had introduced them to new ways of behaving and relating to the wider society.

In a study of Catholic school children and students, Lawlor (1965) found what she described as evidence of an impressive, real and deep religious commitment. At the same time, she found their religion to emphasise the other worldly and to be associated with a tendency to contract out of this world and the human community and a tendency to lack concern for others.

In 1958 Spencer (1968) made a study of 1,652 Catholics between the ages of 15 and 24. He found that 75% of those who had some Catholic schooling claimed to go to church weekly, but so did 74% of those who had not attended Catholic schools but had attended catechism lessons outside school hours. In a later study conducted in the mid 1960s among 7,722 British born adult Catholics, Spencer found that a quarter of those Catholics who had not attended Catholic schools practised their faith, compared with two-fifths of those who had always experienced Catholic schools.

The second strand brings together three studies conducted during the 1970s by Michael Hornsby-Smith and his associates and summarised by Hornsby-Smith (1978). A study carried out with Ann Thomas compared the attitudes of girls educated in an Anglican school and in a Catholic convent school. The data demonstrated that the girls in the Catholic school were more likely to aspire to outstanding scholarship or sporting achievement, were more preoccupied with the state of family life, and were more critical toward television, modern art and modern drama.

A study conducted with Margaret Petit and repeated more fully by Hornsby-Smith and Petit (1975) employed a set of 16 items concerned with a range of social, moral and religious attitudes. Their factor analyses identified as many as six factors within this group of items, with most factors being defined by only two items each. The items were used to discuss the differences between pupils attending Catholic and county schools, as well as to profile the attitudes of pupils within the Catholic school sec-