Some Political Behaviour Patterns and Attitudes of Roman Catholic Priests in a Rural Part of Northern Ireland*

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THE activities of churchmen in the field of politics can be approached by the political scientist on two levels. On the macro-political level, the church as a whole is taken to be the unit of analysis. This approach views the church as being one of society's many interest groups, articulating demands about subjects it deems important for the moral welfare of its members.[1] The subject may also be approached on the micro-political level, focusing on the individual priest or group of priests. Here, the church is viewed not as an amorphous whole, a unit in space, but rather as a continuum running right through from the basic parish level, to the diocese, to the ecclesiastical province and on to the national and higher levels of church organisation. The micro-analyst cuts in on this continuum and attempts to examine the political attitudes and behaviour of the selected unit of analysis, taking account of the salient issues, individuals, circumstances, etc.

Macro- or aggregate analysis shrouds much of the variety and variability which analysis at the micro- or individual level often reveals. Micro-analysis is thus expected to cast some light on the political attitudes and behaviour of the individual or group of individuals. The behavioural approach to politics posits the political behaviour of the individual as being the central and crucial empirical datum.[2] The existence and political importance of institutions is not denied. What is asserted is that institutions do not, and cannot, exist physically apart from the people who inhabit them.

This paper is an attempt to explore certain political behaviour patterns and

1. See e.g. J. H. Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland 1923–1970*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1971.

2. H. Eulau, *The Behavioural Persuasion in Politics*, Random House, New York, 1963, p. 14.

attitudes of secular Roman Catholic priests ministering in a rural area in Northern Ireland west of the Bann. The aims of the project were twofold. Firstly, it set out to capture certain aspects of the respondents' attitudes to the Northern Ireland regime. Secondly, it aimed to explore the nature and extent of the rural priests' involvement in two issues which were deemed, *a priori*, to be local parish problems: the allocation of public authority housing to Catholic parishioners, and local unemployment among the Catholic community. The empirical field work on which the study is based was undertaken by the author in a selected rural area in September-October 1968. Though all the interviews had not been completed by 5th October, 1968, the date the Civil Rights campaign began in Derry, it was not then apparent that something of major consequence had been set in motion.

An Exploratory Survey

The project was exploratory in that limitations of both time and resources largely shaped the scope of the survey. Ideally it would have been desirable to draw a representative sample of Catholic priests serving in all rural parts of Northern Ireland. However, because of the above constraints, the strategy adopted was to select a small well-defined rural area and then to attempt to contact and interview all the parochial priests ministering within that region. The merit of this approach is that one gains depth by focusing on the attitudes and behaviour of a small number of respondents but the findings cannot be taken as being representative of the generality of priests serving in rural areas in Northern Ireland. Eleven priests were interviewed, which places the paper decidedly in the exploratory small group study category. The findings of this paper are thus tentative and suggestive rather than conclusive.

The Theoretical Frame: Role and the Institution

Given that man's political behaviour is but one facet of his total behaviour the behavioural approach to politics is interdisciplinary in orientation. It therefore proceeds by selecting, from what is already known about the subject under examination, that information which seems particularly relevant. The concept of "role" is useful in capturing multiple relationships. Role may be defined as a socially prescribed way of behaving in particular situations for any person occupying a given social position or status.[3] A role thus represents what a person expects himself to do and is expected to do in a given situation by virtue of the social position he holds. Every individual has many roles, varying according to the situation.

In defining the priestly role in society, institutional factors play an important part. Indeed, the influence a religious leader of a congregation has upon his flock, or the type of leadership he is permitted to exercise in his role, is a function of

3. R. M. Stogdill, E. Scott & W. Jaynes: *Leadership and Role Expectations*, Columbus, Ohio State University, 1956, Chap. 1.

the way in which the religious group is organised. Broadly speaking, three types of church organisation have developed among religious groups, each of which defines its leadership somewhat differently. These are the congregational, the presbyterian and the episcopal types which, as categories, are not confined to the organised churches which bear these formal names. The role of the religious leader is affected by the kind of church structure within which he operates. For example, the congregational structure emphasises the power of the local congregation over the minister whom it not only hires, but may also dismiss if it so desires. The power of the local minister or church leader is thus limited; he is responsible to groups below him in the church and there may be no hierarchy above to which he can appeal if a disagreement arises. In the presbyterian system of church organisation, the presbytery is the controlling body. The presbytery is usually composed of a group of ministers from a given area. However, considerable authority is still vested in the local congregation through its representative body—the elders. In this type of church structure, the local church leader is to some extent in the middle, being subject both to pressures from above and below. With presbytery support, however, the local minister might be able to lead his congregation into paths not previously accepted by them. Finally, we have the episcopal structure. The parallel here is, to some extent, with an army. Formal chains of command exist with final authority resting with the individuals or individual at the top. While the local clergyman may be subjected to informal pressures from his flock, his ultimate responsibility, in terms of retaining his position, is to his hierarchical superiors. In determining the role of the local religious leader it is thus necessary to note the institutional setting within which he operates.[4]

General Roles

In a broad analysis of roles, Banton suggests that clergymen occupy what he terms a "general" role in society.[5] The general role, he suggests, is "frequently associated with activities important in the moral order of society such as those of a political or religious character."[6] Banton cites doctors, members of parliament, policemen and priests as examples of this category. A general role, usually, either restrains the incumbent from engaging in a whole series of activities open to the ordinary person or confers influence and prestige upon the incumbent which is widely recognised in many situations or indeed both. In short, a general role implies privileges on the incumbent on the one hand and restraints on his behaviour on the other. It is thus of particular interest to examine the nature of the priests' privileged position in society and the corresponding restraints upon his field of action. These factors have important implications for his political activities.

4. G. M. Vernon: *Sociology of Religion*, McGraw, New York, 1962, Chapter 10.

5. M. Banton: *Roles: An Introduction to the Study of Social Relations*, Tavistock, London, 1965, Chapter 3.

6. *Ibid*. p. 40.

Some Specific Roles

Fichter's analysis provides a finer focus on the variety of specific roles taken by parochial clergy in the course of their ministry.[7] Working from the parish church, which we may take to be the institutional anchor of the priest's activities, the following specific roles can be distinguished:

—The priest's *liturgical* role centres round the religious services conducted in the parish church. In this role he has to co-ordinate the voluntary activities of such lay groups as choirs, altar servers, altar society groups, etc.

—The *socio-spiritual* role concerns the priest's relations with parish groups which are primarily spiritual in their goals, e.g., Legion of Mary, Sodalities, etc. Many such groups may be organised on a nationwide basis and behaviour patterns may thus be well defined for the priest in performing his duties.

—The *ameliorative* role is usually performed through parish agencies which exist to bring relief to needy members of the parish. Supervision of the various parish relief societies provides the priest with knowledge of many of the social problems of the parish.

—The *educational* role involves the management of the parochial schools. This role may become fairly institutionalised due to regulations flowing from diocesan headquarters and from administrative requirements of government departments concerning school administration and procedures.

—The *businessman* role centres around the raising and administration of funds necessary for the maintenance, and possible extension, of parish plant. This role tends to be organised relative to the degree of urbanisation in the parish. Increasingly, priests are adopting the norms and standards of the commerical world in fulfilling this role.

—The *recreational* role does not refer to the priests own leisure-time pursuits but to the parish recreational or athletic groups. Aside from parish concerts and drama groups, where clerical sponsorship and participation is not unknown, the Irish clergy have had a long association with the Gaelic Athletic Association and many serve on local committees.

—The priest's *civic* role probably takes him furthest from his church-oriented functions. As a respected and influential member of the local rural community, the priest is often expected, and sometimes forced, to play a large part in community activities. The approval, and at times participation, of the local priest as a representative of the Catholic community may often be sought by those organising wider community activities.[8]

7. J. H. Fichter, S.J, *Social Relations in the Urban Parish,* University of Chicago Press, 1954. The analysis, as outlined, draws heavily on Fichter's work. Though Fichter's analysis is conducted in terms of an urban parish, it will be seen that much of his schema is relevant to the rural parish also.

8. While the attitude of the local Catholic community would be important in determining the nature and scope of the priest's civic role, in some circumstances the expectations of the local Protestant community could be crucial.

In the foregoing we have outlined a variety of roles taken by parochial clergy within which political action may occur.[9] It is not suggested that every priest displays the same competence in all these roles but, where the situation demanded it, some minimum competence would be expected in the various roles. While the wide range of roles might seem unwieldy or even inconsistent in some cases, e.g., the businessman and ameliorative roles, the overall task is simplified due to institutionalisation and standardisation deriving from repeated performance. The lone country priest might have to take on many, if not all, of these roles depending on the range of both formal and informal groupings in his parish.

Status and Leadership in Northern Ireland

Thus far our discussion has mainly centred on the priest in the context of the local Catholic community. It is desirable to widen the focus at this stage to look at the overall social status of both the priest and clergyman in Northern Ireland society in order to shed some light on the wider milieu within which they operate.[10]

In small rural face-to-face communities, where people meet regularly, it is possible for social status to be organised in a system in which people would have places and behave accordingly. The people and groups who exercise and command authority in this kind of system are designated by tradition rather than by the possession of individual attributes or skills.[11] Within such traditional status systems certain groups or people may enjoy a "total" status in the society, i.e., individuals tend to have similar status accorded them in different spheres of activity.[12] The evidence we have to hand is suggestive, though by no means conclusive, that in certain rural parts of Northern Ireland a limited form of traditional status system survives, at least for a minister of religion.[13] For example, in a study on the selection of leaders in a rural district in Northern Ireland, Harris discovered that two main categories of "formal" leaders emerged in the Protestant community.[14] The first category consisted of those who came to the district in

9. The outlined theoretical schema does not preclude the possibility that some of the more religious roles may be politicised in certain circumstances. For example, the socio-spiritual role could have interesting political effects if the formal groupings were being organised as an interest group in defence of a "moral" issue, e.g., current Irish divorce or contraception regulations. Cf. J. H. Whyte, op. cit.

10. The terms "priest" and "clergyman", as used in Northern Ireland without a denominational prefix, tend to have specific connotations. Generally speaking, the word "priest" denotes a Catholic cleric while the word "clergyman" denotes a minister of any of the Protestant denominations.

11. D. E. Plowman, Minchinton & Stacey, "Local Social Status in England and Wales", in Sociological Review, Vol. 10, 1962.

12. Ibid., pp. 167–170.

13. See Introduction to the Politics of the Developing Areas, Ed. G. A. Almond and J. S. Coleman, Princeton University Press, 1960, on the mixed character of political systems, pp. 20–25.

14. R. Harris, "The Selection of Leaders in Ballybeg," in Sociological Review, Vol. 9, 1961. Harris defined a "formal leader" as one who "acts as spokesman at meetings and takes a leading position in various organisations". p. 137.

a professional capacity—the local doctors, teachers and clergymen. The second and lower category consisted of a small minority, who, though unsupported by any professional role, were nevertheless in a position to act as leaders because they were to some extent socially separated from the majority of Protestants in the area. In the former group, however, the clergyman emerged as the most important "leader". He was observed to act as leader whenever people were gathered together. For example, he generally initiated conversation in private gatherings and when present at a public meeting was generally expected to act as chairman. With tact, the clergyman could find himself in a position from which he could exert considerable influence. While Harris's study was confined to the leadership structure in the Protestant community, there is no reason to doubt the applicability of her remarks to the Catholic community. The priest, *ex officio,* is more powerful than any layman in the church and, moreover, there may be fewer persons of professional status in Catholic parishes.[15]

Survey data point to the high social status enjoyed by both Protestant and Catholic clergymen in Northern Ireland.[16] A 1968 survey on the attitudes of Northern Ireland youth asked about respect for persons in different social categories. Both the question and the responses, analysed according to the religious affiliation of the respondents, are shown here:

Question: Which of these groups of people do you have most respect for?

TABLE 1: *Youth Attitudes to Certain Social Groups (National Opinion Poll Survey)*
(percentages)

Group	R.C.	C. of I.	Presbyterian	Others	All Respondents
Clergymen	46	26	30	23	34
Doctors	24	39	40	39	34
Teachers	12	11	10	16	12
Sportsmen	6	6	6	2	5
Businessmen	3	5	3	9	4
Pop Stars	1	5	3	2	3
Politicans	2	2	2	—	2
Farmers	2	2	4	2	2
Don't Know	4	4	2	7	4

Doctors and clergymen tie at the head of the youth poll as being the "most respected" persons in the community. However, there is a significant difference in the degree of deference accorded to the doctor or clergyman according to the religious affiliation of the respondent. While all the Protestant respondents

15. See R. Rose, *Governing without Consensus: An Irish Perspective,* Faber, London, 1971; p. 280.
16. National Opinion Poll Survey of Youth Attitudes in Northern Ireland, 1968.

(including Others) consistently accorded higher "respect" to the doctor than to the clergyman, the situation is reversed among the Catholics. This finding has interesting implications for the priest and these are discussed in the following section.

Leadership and the Behavioural Approach

Hollander defines a leader as an individual with a status that permits him to exercise influence over other individuals.[17] This definition leads one to define and locate a leader by reference to his structural position in the group.[18] This common method of locating "leaders", though easy and convenient, tells us nothing about the behaviour of the "leader" thus located. The behavioural approach to the leadership question deviates somewhat from the traditional approach. The latter approach has frequently been normative, in that it has dealt with the question of who should lead; what traits or qualities the leader should possess; how he should behave, etc. Our approach to leadership is descriptive-analytic rather than normative.[19] We are interested in who, in fact, leads in any given situation, not in who should lead; how such leaders behave, rather than in how they should or should not behave. Thus, a more appropriate definition of leadership for our purposes might be that of Pigors, who considered leadership from the viewpoint of a group process or function. He considered leadership as a process of mutual stimulation which, by the successful interplay of relevant individual differences, controls human energy in the pursuit of a common cause.[20] This suggests that leadership is not a trait possessed by an individual but is related to the functioning of the group. An individual is not always a leader or non-leader. At times he may perform the leadership function and at other times not. Because an individual performs the leadership function in one group area or situation, does not mean that he will necessarily perform the same function in different group areas or situations. This overall refinement in definition, however, having an emphasis on function in the group rather than on high status, leads us to designate persons of high social status as occupants of positions of potential leadership in the group or community.

In pursuit of his purely religious roles, the priest is the undisputed leader of his group (flock). Given therefore the priest's leadership function in certain specified roles, and his high social status, he occupies a *potential* leadership position in areas not immediately religious. An interesting empirical question thus arises. To what extent does the local priest in Northern Ireland translate that potential into action in non-religious areas? In the empirical section which follows, two

17. See E. P. Hollander, *Leaders, Groups and Influence*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1964, p. 16.

18. See S. Verba, *Small Groups and Political Behaviour (A Study of Leadership)*, Princeton University Press, 1960, p. 115 on the sociometric technique of identifying leaders.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 113. See also A. W. Gouldner, "An approach to leadership" in S. Ulmer (ed.), *Introductory Readings in Political Behaviour*, Chicago, Rand McNally, 1961, pp. 447–458.

20. See Verba, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

issues are introduced, i.e., public authority housing and unemployment, which were deemed, *a priori*, to be local problems offering interesting possibilities for political action by the priest on a number of levels. We will observe the approach to these issues by the local priests and the self-perceived limitations on their political actions in relation to them.

Scope and Methods

A Northern Ireland parliamentary constituency was deemed to be an appropriate geographical entity within which to conduct the survey. The rural constituency finally selected met two conditions. Firstly, any possible effects of cross-diocesan variations were excluded, by choosing a constituency which fell *in toto* within the one diocese. Secondly, as it was postulated, *a priori*, that the cross-local-administrative-district variable might be an interesting independent variable, the constituency ultimately chosen straddled both a Unionist-and non-Unionist-controlled local administrative district. The cross-administrative-district factor refers to the political affiliation of the controlling group on the local council; i.e., the rural or urban district council. This variable, which is central to the study, is discussed more fully later in the text.

Having thus selected a constituency which satisfied these conditions, a list of priests, resident in and attached to the territorial parishes in the constituency, was drawn up by reference to the appropriate register and directories.[21] At this stage it was discovered that only nine parochial priests ministered within the confines of the constituency.[22] This was rather less than had been expected and the spread of priests as between the Unionist- and non-Unionist-controlled areas was uneven. It was therefore decided to extend the boundary of the constituency into the adjacent non-Unionist-controlled local authority area so as to include the first three priests living nearest to the parliamentary constituency boundary.

A letter was sent to each prospective respondent, introducing the author and outlining the general nature of the survey. (See Appendix I.) Within a few days each priest was contacted by telephone and arrangements were made for an interview at the priest's residence. Neither at this stage, nor later at the interviews, did the author express a particular interest in the political aspects of the research. Out of twelve possible respondents, arrangements were made to interview eleven. The one refusal, which was on grounds of infirmity and old age, came

21. The then current constituency electoral register was used in conjunction with the *Irish Catholic Directory*, 1968.

22. A distinction may be drawn between parochial and non-parochial priests. The latter group refers to chaplains, teacher-priests and those in religious orders, etc., as distinct from the parochial priest attached to and ministering in a territorial parish. The parochial priest (the term is used here to include both the pastor and his curate) having close relations with a large number of people in a specified area over time, is the more interesting from our research standpoint and is the focus of this paper. Through constant interaction with his parishioners, the parochial priest is in a position to exert influence over them and, according to Fichter, this influence "though originally primarily religious, extended soon into the moral, social, cultural and political fields". J. H. Fichter, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

from a priest resident in the non-Unionist-controlled area. This reduced the total number of actual respondents to eleven. The distribution of these respondents by local authority area was as follows: seven resided in Unionist-controlled local authority areas and four lived in a non-Unionist-controlled district.

The interview schedule was administered personally, by the author, in the respondents' residences. (See Appendix II). All the interviews were concentrated within a three-week period and were completed by mid-October, 1968.

Organisation of the Data

The findings are presented in the following order. Firstly, some general background data on our respondents are described. This is not only because such variables are readily measurable and intrinsically interesting, but also because they are usually strongly correlated with voting and other patterns of political behaviour.[23] Given the small number of respondents in this project, any attempt to correlate these variables with observed behaviour and attitudes is ruled out. We can, however, use the background data to help come to some general conclusions about the kind of profile our respondents present by reference to broadly similar extant data. In the next section, the respondents' attitudes to the Northern Ireland constitutional position, and to the related issues of group identity and party partisanship, are examined. In the last major section of the paper, the observed political behaviour of the respondents, in relation to the local authority housing and unemployment issues in both the Unionist- and non-Unionist-controlled areas, is described and analysed.

The Socio-economic Profile

Among a group of men who, by definition, share the same occupational class and status, interest focuses initially on their background and social origins. The occupations of the respondents' parents were predominantly rural. Five were farmers and a further three had farms as well as a second source of income, a not uncommon feature of rural Irish society. The second occupations of the three "part-time" farmers were teacher, blacksmith and shopkeeper, respectively. Two of the three remaining respondents were sons of policemen, while the third was the son of an auctioneer, who had also worked as a lawyer's clerk. The size of farm holdings is an important indicator of social status in rural communities. Four of the five full-time farmers had farms of less than fifty acres and one of these had a farm of less than thirty acres.

In assessing these occupations, the generally low rural social status origins of most of the respondents is evident. Two further surveys covering, among other things, the social origins of Irish secular clergy, broadly tend to confirm this

23. A more elaborate treatment of these basic variables builds up a picture of the political socialisation process of the individual. See H. H. Hyman, *Political Socialisation*, The Free Press, New York, 1959.

picture.[24] However, because of reasons of size, definition, etc., neither Ward's nor Newman's findings are strictly comparable with each other, nor can they be compared with our findings here. However, it may be observed that the social origins of our eleven respondents, taken in a comparative vein, are not untypical of the social background of the generality of Irish secular clergy. Our small universe may, however, be slightly biased, showing an even greater degree of rural origin than the other surveys seem to indicate.[25]

Nine of the eleven respondents were born and reared in what is now Northern Ireland. One of the remaining two was born and reared in a portion of the diocese which lies within the Republic, and the other respondent had a mobile youth following his father's postings (a policeman) and lived in a variety of rural and urban areas throughout Ireland (including Dublin) for limited periods. All respondents, with the exception of the latter, were born and lived either in the countryside itself or in small towns of less than 1,500 population.

Eight of the respondents were trained for the priesthood at Maynooth College— the national seminary of Ireland. Of the remaining three, two were trained at the Irish College, Paris, and one in Salamanca, Spain. The proportion of continental trained priests is falling, and will fall over time, since both the Salamanca and Paris colleges have not been used since World War II for the training of Irish priests. Eight men held higher educational qualifications in the form of university degrees. These were either the B.A., B.D., or both. One of the younger men held an M.A. qualification. The latter degree was obtained at Queen's University Belfast, while all the other degrees were conferred by Maynooth College, which is a constituent college of the National University of Ireland.

Eight of the respondents were curates while three men enjoyed the status of Parish Priest in the local organisational structure. As one might expect, the three oldest priests occupied the higher organisational positions.[26] There were no "late vocations" among them, indicating that all followed the normal recruitment avenue into the church. All were ordained within the age range of 23 to 26 years.

24. See C. Ward, *Survey of Vocations* (Third Year Theologians—Table 12), Dublin 1969, and J. Newman, *A Socio-Religious Survey of the Number and Patterns of Priestly Vocations in Ireland* (Table IX (b)).

25. One commentator has described Maynooth's intake of students as being "predominantly petit-bourgeois" while in the same article Newman is quoted as saying that "parish clergy, farmers, rural businessmen and white-collar workers speak the same language as it were, or, to put it differently, are on the same wavelength. The pastoral advantages of this situation are immeasurable . . ." See M. Viney, "The People's Priest," *The Irish Times*, April 16th, 1968.

26. The age structure of the respondents as at the date of interview was as follows:

Age Groups				
25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	Total
2	2	4	3	11

Attitudes: Group Identity

The cultural identity of minority groups within any state is an important factor in the formation of individual attitudes to the state. To analyse the various factors leading up to a commonly shared group identity would carry one back into the life experiences of the individual citizens and into the political history of that particular society. The factors which have welded the Protestant and Catholic communities in Northern Ireland into their differing political outlooks have been well documented by the historians elsewhere and need not detain us here.[27]

In the Catholic community one would expect an unambiguous and dominant Irish identity, that is, an identity that is islandwide. Yet, one commentator has suggested that "it would be unconventional for a Catholic to admit to a loyalty to Northern Ireland rather than to all Ireland but such a loyalty is not unknown. . . ."[28] One aspect of group identity was explored in the survey. Each respondent was asked which term best described the way he usually thought of himself and was then presented with the following terms: British, Irish, Ulsterman, sometimes British/Irish, Anglo-Irish or any Other term. The result was unanimous. All respondents opted, without hesitation, for the term "Irish". For example:—

"I have never thought of myself as being anything other than Irish: . .", or

"Irish . . . this is a cultural and historic thing. . . ."

This finding is unequivocal and our respondents would appear to be slightly more coherent in their identity than the Catholic community as a whole. This conclusion can be drawn from an inspection of the following table which summarises responses to the same question put to a random sample of people throughout Northern Ireland in 1968 in a survey conducted by Rose.[29]

TABLE 2: *Group Identities (Northern Ireland Sample)—percentages*

Individual thinks of self as:	Catholic	Protestant	All
British	15	39	29
Irish	76	20	43
Ulsterman	5	32	21
Sometimes British/Irish	3	6	5
Anglo-Irish	1	2	1
Other, DK	—	1	1

Source: Rose, op. cit., 1971, p. 208.

27. See P. A. Fahy, *The R.C. Priest and Local Politics in Northern Ireland*, Part I (Historical Review) for a summary and list of references (unpublished M.Sc. Thesis, University of Strathclyde, 1969).

28. See D. P. Barritt and C. F. Carter, *The Northern Ireland Problem*, Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 7. The identity of the Protestant is much less predictable, in that, in the Protestant community, there is a mixture of Irish, British and local Ulster identities.

29. R. Rose, *op. cit.*

Attitude to the Regime

Group identity is likely to be strongly correlated with political outlooks. On most, if not all, political issues in Northern Ireland, the watershed tends to centre on attitudes to the Union with Britain or, to put it in popular terms, on attitudes to the constitutional position of Northern Ireland. The question of attitudes to the constitutional position raises the issue of regime legitimacy. Legitimacy refers to the ability of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society. Groups in society regard the extant political system as legitimate or illegitimate according to the way its values fit with their own. A major test of legitimacy is the extent to which political entities have developed a common secular political culture, usually in the form of commonly shared national rituals and holidays.[30] In divided societies, different groups within the state have different sets of historical heroes and symbols. In Northern Ireland, the Catholic minority derives its symbols and heroes, in the main, from the island-wide culture and from the long struggle for national independence. The Protestant majority derives its symbols and heroes largely from the fight for religious freedom and Protestant supremacy in the late seventeenth century and from the subsequent struggle against the Catholic masses in their demands for political rights and equality. In an attempt to capture attitudes to the legitimacy of the Northern Ireland regime, each respondent was asked:

Q. There has always been a lot of controversy about the constitutional position in Northern Ireland. On balance, do you approve or disapprove of it?

This resulted in immediate disapproval by ten respondents. (The eleventh questionnaire could not be completed owing to the call of pastoral duties!) This unanimous finding, while of interest, tells us nothing, however, about underlying attitudes to the constitutional position. Two follow-up questions attempted to explore some of these attitudes. The first supplementary asked why the respondent held that view (disapproval). Six of the ten replies centred on an assumed natural unity of the island, e.g.:

"I'd like to see a united Ireland. It is an unnatural division of the country. . . .",

Of the four remaining replies, size was mentioned by one—"Ireland is too small for two Governments . . ." and another gave "personal political and cultural ideas" as a reason. A third disapproved because Northern Ireland "had been created in favour of a minority in the country . . .", while the remaining respondent offered the following:

"I suppose I'm a nationalist broadly. I believe in an independent Ireland, though with good relations with England. Even an independent Northern Ireland would be more acceptable. I would quarrel with the Crown jurisdiction. . . ."

30. See S. M. Lipset, *Political Man*, Heinemann, London 1969, Chapter 3.

On this evidence, the majority viewpoint of the respondents would seem to be based solely on the geographical argument—on the physical unity of the island, and, following from this, its "unnatural" division.

Given the unanimous disapproval of the existing constitutional arrangement by the respondents, the second follow-up question attempted to establish the kind of alternative to which they would prefer to give allegiance. Each respondent was asked:

Q. What would you like to see in its (the current constitution's) place?

Five of the ten respondents opted unequivocally for a united Ireland. Three respondents expressed an interest in some form of federal solution, e.g.:

> "If (Irish) union is out then we could have a central government with representation from both parts (of Ireland) . . . the federal idea but with an independent federal parliament. . . ."

The two remaining respondents were less specific. While both shared a basic desire to see a united Ireland, one priest was in favour of some unspecified ties with England, while the other expressed a desire for "an Irish Republic but a republic bordering on socialism. . . ." The view favouring a united Ireland is probably representative of the basic sentiment behind the traditional nationalist approach. Three men expressing themselves in favour of some kind of federal system of Irish government indicates an ability to compromise between the two extremes of the Union on the one hand, and an independent, all-Ireland on the other.

Party Identification

Many studies of voting behaviour have shown that voters' party preferences persist through time, independent to a large degree, of the personalities and issues involved. A sense of individual party identification does not usually reflect formal membership of, or active connection with, a party apparatus. Indeed, such identification may not even denote a good voting record, though the influence of party allegiance on voting turnout is strong.[31] Students of voting behaviour often place voters on a continuum of partisanship from Left to Right— Labour to Conservative; Democrat to Republican, etc. However, given Northern Ireland's unique politico-religious division, the conventional Left-Right dimension is probably inappropriate especially in rural areas. A more appropriate dimension along which to rank individuals in terms of party choice is probably the Republican-Unionist dimension. On such a continuum the watershed would be the attitude of the individual to the question of the border and all that flows from that issue. The following question was used to establish party identification:

Q. Generally speaking, what party do you usually think of yourself as supporting?

31. A. Campbell, P. Converse, Miller & Stokes, *The American Voter*, New York, Wiley, 1960, Chaps. 4 to 7.

B

The eight respondents who identified with existing political parties could be placed, broadly, on the republican side of the continuum. However, only six of these opted for the Nationalist party which could be regarded as being the traditional parliamentary party of the republican aspirant. Even among these six men, some voiced considerable disenchantment with it as a party. Though impressionistic, the man who said—"I think it is a hopeless party . . ." seemed to express a view which was common to a greater or lesser extent among the other respondents. There was also considerable haziness as to what the Nationalist party stood for, apart from the central notion of a united Ireland. After much hesitation and probing two priests opted for two of the smaller non-Unionist parties—the Liberal and National Democratic Parties. One claimed to support the principles of "the Left", but stated that none of the existing parties of the Left quite suited his taste. Finally two men claimed to identify with no political party whatever and seemed to express a sense of apathy and frustration which is found among individuals and groups who have despaired of ever influencing events. None of the respondents mentioned the radical republican party—Sinn Féin. The lack of influence of the non-Unionist parties should, however, be seen against a background of little or no political organisation in many constituencies, particularly in the rural areas. Also, the absence of electoral contests in very many Northern Ireland constituencies, which was a feature of the political scene, at least up to February 1969, should be borne in mind.[32]

While the strength of party identification was not measured directly in the study, the impression gained was one of very weak attachment to the parties chosen. The interest aggregation function of the non-Unionist parties was confused, diffuse and non-salient in the Autumn of 1968, from the viewpoint of our respondents at least.[33] In view of this, the limited objectives, clearly articulated demands, style and, most important, the effectiveness of the Northern Ireland civil rights campaign and of the political groupings which grew out of the campaign, contributed in large measure to the decline of the Nationalist and other minor non-Unionist parties since 1969.

Political Behaviour: Environmental Factor

The second objective of the study was to explore the nature of the priest's political participation in the local political arena. Specifically, our interest centred on the extent (if any) and manner in which he activated his potential leadership role on behalf of his community, in relation to two issues which were deemed to be problems in the parishes: the distribution of local authority housing and unemployment. It was felt that one of the factors which might contribute to political action on the part of the priest could be the kind of local administrative district in which he found himself at work—the environmental variable.

32. Cf. R. Rose, *op. cit.,* Chap. 7.
33. See G. Almond and J. Coleman, *op. cit.,* Introduction pp. 38–45, for a discussion of the interest aggregation function in political systems.

Four major types of local administrative districts exist in Northern Ireland. These are the County Borough, the Municipal Borough, the Urban and the Rural District. There is also, of course, an over-arching structure which is the County Administrative area—the County Council—but this unit is of little relevance to the study.[34] Our selected research constituency incorporated one Urban District and parts of three Rural Districts. In the vast majority of local government areas in Northern Ireland, Unionists form the uninterrupted majority group on the local councils. How this came to be so, in a number of areas, is well documented elsewhere.[35] A few Urban and Rural districts, mainly in the southern and western parts of Northern Ireland remained under non-Unionist control. Our research constituency covered part of one of these non-Unionist-controlled districts, thus affording some limited scope for a comparative study across two types of local administrative area—the Unionist and non-Unionist-controlled local authority area.

The basic aim behind this part of the study was to explore the extent to which the environmental factor described above could be held to be a contributory factor to any political action by the respondents, on behalf of their parishioners, in relation to the local housing and unemployment issues. This was the broad frame within which the exploratory work was conducted. The first task, however, was to establish that the two selected issues were, in fact, problem issues in the parishes.

Identification of Local Problems

In approaching this part of the study, it was decided to begin by tapping the priest's views on the "biggest problem" troubling all the people of Northern Ireland, by means of the open-ended question. From this global introduction, the focus of the interview was shifted to the "biggest problem" troubling the Catholic community generally in Northern Ireland. Finally, the focus was narrowed further by asking the respondents to define the "biggest problem" facing the priest's own parishioners. This zoom technique was useful in that it enabled one to compile a list of problems defined wholly by the respondents at three different levels—(a) those facing the community in general in Northern Ireland, (b) those facing the Catholic community in general, and (c) those problems facing Catholics in the respondents' own parishes. Clusters of problems could thus be identified at each level of questioning and the definition of local problems by the respondents provided a natural cue for further probing into the respondents, involvement with them. This phase of the interview was introduced with a broad, general open-ended question about Northern Ireland's problems as follows:

Q. Thinking now about Northern Ireland, what do you feel to be the biggest problem troubling the people of Northern Ireland today:

34. As part of the current programme of reforms, the Northern Ireland Government is undertaking a radical re-shaping of local government.

35. See F. Gallagher, *The Indivisible Island*, Gollancz, London, 1957, Chap. 5, and Cameron Report, *Disturbances in Northern Ireland*, H.M.S.O., Cmd. 532, on gerrymandering.

. Out of a total of fourteen identified problems (some respondents offered more than one), the community relations issue was mentioned eight times, as indicated by the following extract:

> "The barrier between the Roman Catholics and Protestants . . '. we have two separate communities here and there is an awareness of this barrier . . . one is not aware of this thing in the South .'. . here the first vital question is what religion is he. . . ."

. The lack of housing and employment was raised by five respondents and one respondent offered "lack of leadership in government" as the biggest problem. The salience of the division of Northern Irish society along religious lines, came across strongly in the replies. It is interesting to note that the housing and un-employment issues also arose spontaneously at this stage. Each respondent was then asked the following, more specific question:

. Q. And what do you feel to be the biggest problem troubling the Catholic com-munity in Northern Ireland today?

Extended replies were again recorded to this question and more than one problem was offered by most priests. Lack of jobs for Catholics and poor prospects for advancement for those in employment were raised by nine respondents. Unfair allocation of houses was mentioned four times. The following quotes were fairly typical:

> "It depends on where you are in Northern Ireland, but on the whole it is difficult for Catholics to get jobs above the labourer level. Housing is also a big problem in some areas. . . ."

> "Well, in employment a Catholic always wonders, despite his education, just what kind of future he will have in his job. They are always aware they will not get the jobs they are qualified for. Also the housing problem . . . the allocation of houses is done along party lines. . . ."

It is interesting to note that the local government representation question, which later became one of the central planks of the civil rights campaign, was much less salient to the respondents (only one mention) than the housing and employ-ment questions in the Autumn of 1968. Two other issues also got one mention each; allegedly unfair education grants by Stormont for Catholic schools, and an inferiority complex among Roman Catholics.

Finally, in an attempt to isolate the issues of major importance facing Catholics in the priest's own parish, each respondent was asked:

> Q. "Now within your parish, what is the biggest problem facing the Catholic community?"

The following hierarchy of "problems" emerged. Employment was mentioned seven times, housing six times and there was one mention each for the local school debt, and religious conviction. The overwhelming preponderance of material problems is striking. The forceful emergence of the employment and housing problems, at the local parish level, emphasised the salience of these issues for the local Catholic communities and their pastors.

Examining the local employment problem according to whether the respondents lived in Unionist or non-Unionist-controlled districts, we find four mentions of the problem in Unionist districts and three mentions in the non-Unionist district. Based on this evidence, there was no reason to believe that there was any particular connection between the incidence of the problem and the type of administrative district in which it occurred. As both types of administrative area were broadly similar and were generally acknowledged to be economically depressed, this result was probably not surprising.

Distributing the housing problem by type of district, however, all six mentions were concentrated in the Unionist district! This result was striking. Even acknowledging the limitations of drawing inferences from such a small sample, the polarisation of the problem by type of administrative district was strongly suggestive of a relationship between the two factors. Serious abuse in the allocation of public authority housing was subsequently found by the Cameron Commission to be one of the basic causes of the subsequent Northern Ireland disturbances.[36]

Definition of Political Behaviour

An operational definition of political behaviour is necessary in order to identify such behaviour. How is one to distinguish political, from other forms of behaviour? Where are the boundaries? While the question is open to a number of possible answers, the definition adopted here, is "that behaviour which affects or is intended to affect the decisional outcomes of government".[37] This definition is serviceable for our purposes if we include local government within its ambit. Thus, the kernel of the project was to explore the extent to which our respondents activated their potential leadership roles by acting politically at the local level as defined here.

Two empirically validated generalisations would lead one to expect some political action in a priest's total behavioural network. The first holds that, in general, higher socio-economic status is positively associated with participation in politics. Many studies have shown, for example, that higher status persons are more likely to vote, attend meetings, join a political party, campaign, etc., than lower socio-economic groups. Secondly, research has shown that persons who are active in community affairs are much more likely to participate in politics than those who are not.[38]

36. Cameron Report, op. cit., Chap. 12.
37. L. W. Milbrath, Political Participation, Rand McNally & Co., Chicago 1965, Introduction.
38. Ibid., See pp. 16-22 for a variety of citations.

The Housing Issue and Political Participation

At this stage in the interview, the open-ended question technique was dropped and a question, focused specifically on the housing and employment issues, was put to each respondent. Therefore, irrespective of whether either or both issues had arisen spontaneously in reply to the previous set of questions, each priest was asked:

Q. One hears a lot these days about the problems of housing and unemployment in Northern Ireland—are they problems in your parish?

In dealing with the replies, it is convenient to separate the issues and analyse the responses on the housing question first. The seven men living in Unionist-controlled districts were unanimous about the existence of a housing problem in their parishes. Only two of the four remaining respondents living in non-Unionist-controlled districts claimed to have a local housing problem. However, these latter "yes" respondents were rather less clear-cut and the following quotes illustrate the qualified nature of their positive answers:

"We have a very marginal difficulty here with housing. The supply of houses from our District Council is fairly adequate. . ."

"Well yes . . . there are 50 applicants in for 22 houses under construction at the moment . . . we will have to get another housing scheme going. . . ."

- Despite the strong qualification in the first quote, it has been included as a "yes" response for the purposes of the study. Both replies, however, seemed to suggest an underlying confidence and optimism that the problem, such as it was, was amenable to solution. In developing the analysis, the nine "yes" respondents to the previous question were each asked:

Q. Do you get involved in your parishioners' housing problems?

Seven of the nine respondents claimed to be involved. This total consisted of five priests resident in Unionist areas and the two respondents quoted above in the non-Unionist area. The term "involved" is, of course, ambiguous. In an attempt to give content to the term each was then asked:

Q. And how do you go about this (involvement)?

The range of activities described by the respondents has been summarised for convenience and can be inspected in the following table.

TABLE 3: *Nature of Involvement in Housing Problem*

Type of Involvement	Number of Mentions
(a) Encourage/Advise Parishioners	3
(b) Talk to local district Council Members	3
(c) Wrote to Housing Trust*	1
(d) Chaired Voluntary Parish Committee—Built 36 Houses	1
(e) Held Public Meeting on Issue	1
(f) Talk to those influential with Council Members	1
(g) Visit Problem Families more	1
(h) Administer some low-rent parish houses	1
(i) No comment	1

(N = 7: some respondents mentioned more than one activity)

*The Northern Ireland Housing Trust, a statutory body, was set up in 1945 to build houses for workers and supplement the efforts of Local Authorities. The Housing Trust selected its tenants both from direct applications and from the Local Authority list, using a strict points system to determine priority. The Trust has long enjoyed a reputation for fairness and just dealing in allocating houses.

The definition of political behaviour adopted above can now be applied to this list, in an attempt to isolate the political activities. Given this test, it can plausibly be argued that the behaviour indicated by categories (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f) in table 3 are political in substance. The remaining categories are, almost certainly, non-political, though more would need to be known about activity (a) before this could be unequivocally ruled out. Category (i) is self-explanatory. In relating the kind of behaviour observed in table 3 to the type of administrative district in which it occurred, an interesting picture emerged. For example, the two respondents resident in the non-Unionist-controlled district were involved only in the activity described in category (b) above. The five "involved" respondents living in Unionist-controlled districts were engaged in the whole range of political activities described (with one mention each) in categories (b), (c), (d), (e) and (f). This finding was suggestive of a connection between area of residence and political involvement. This hypothesis is strengthened if one ranks the political actions in table 3 by some crude measure of weight or potency. Given this test, we note that the more significant political acts, (d) and (e), occurred within Unionist districts.

Some of the individual responses to the above questions provided interesting cues for speculation and further research. For example, one priest's action in organising a voluntary local committee to build a relatively large number of houses, seemed to be related to strong environmental stimuli, where the supply

of houses by the local authority was less than adequate for his parishioners' needs. The taking over of the house-building function, which is normally performed by the local civic authority, was a not uncommon feature of clerical activity in some parts of Northern Ireland, at least up to late 1968. The respondent who held a public meeting locally about the housing shortage, while freely admitting his "involvement", discounted any notion of "leadership" on his part. However, from the behavioural point of view, he would almost certainly appear to have exercised a leadership function. This same respondent also hinted at other dimensions of political action—the episodic as opposed to the continuous nature of his behaviour, and he displayed an awareness of the overt and covert aspects of his actions.[39]

The Unemployment Issue

Considering, finally, the unemployment problem in the parishes, precisely the same form of questioning was pursued as above. However, owing to the smallness of the numbers in the relevant cells, and to the very limited measure of political behaviour observed in this area, this section can be treated in a more summary fashion. The findings are of interest, however, in shedding some light on the self-perceived boundaries of action in this area by individual priests. Nine of the eleven respondents replied in the affirmative to the lead question on the existence of an unemployment problem in the parish. Six of the seven respondents resident in Unionist-controlled areas and three of the four living in the non-Unionist area reported a local unemployment problem. This breakdown did not suggest any particular bias in the incidence of the problem. Each of the nine positive respondents was then asked whether or not he got involved in his parishioner's employment problems. There was a sharp drop in the number of positive responses to this question, resulting in a total of four "yes" answers, which were equally divided between the two types of district. The five remaining respondents claimed to be "uninvolved". Given this fairly even spread between those who were "involved" and those "uninvolved", and bearing in mind the very small numbers in each cell, the following lines of inquiry were pursued. Firstly, the "involved" respondents were asked to elaborate on the nature of their involvement and secondly, the "uninvolved" respondents were asked to explain their passivity, in the face of an admitted employment problem in their parishes.

Thus, taking the four "involved" respondents, the nature of their involvement ranged from recommending parishioners for jobs in both the private and public sectors, when vacancies became known to the local priest, to passing on word to an unemployed parishioner about a vacancy of which the priest might have

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39. See Milbrath, *op. cit.* Chap. 1 for a full treatment of these and other dimensions of political participation. The impression gained by the author in the course of these interviews was that the political scientist's definition of political action differed from the implied definition of most of the respondents. Generally speaking, the respondents appeared to share a much narrower view of what was "political" than the behavioural analyst.

heard. These sporadic activities largely consisted of using personal contacts to secure employment for a parishioner when a suitable vacancy occurred. The political content of these actions was extremely limited. The type of involvement outlined would probably differ little from the kind of behaviour to be expected from other influential, socially oriented persons in any economically depressed area.

Finally, each of the five priests uninvolved in their parishioners' unemployment problems were asked why they did not get involved. The notion was rejected out of hand by the respondent who said:

"There is nothing I can do . . . how can I give employment here. . . .?"

Another respondent stated, as his reason, that the task was one for the local Labour Exchange, and was, anyway, outside his scope. Another respondent's reasons were rather more complex as the following quote shows:

"Well, here you would have to get into local politics which would be bad . . .
you see there are so many here who seem to be in equal need that in helping one
you would have to let somebody else down who would then bear a grudge . . .
this could cut off the spiritual road to you. . . ."

The replies suggested that, from the priest's point of view, the problems surrounding the unemployment difficulties of the parishioners were clearly outside his sphere of influence. While the problem was acknowledged, and concern expressed by many respondents, initiatives by them at the local level seemed to be ruled out. Given the overall complexity of the economic issue, this attitude was hardly surprising. Even among the priests who were involved, it was explicit, in many cases, that the scope for action by the local priest in relation to the problem was very limited indeed.

Summary and Conclusions

A brief review of the literature suggested that clergymen in general occupied positions of high status in Northern Ireland, offering interesting possibilities for potential leadership in areas beyond their purely religious functions. With this in mind the aims of this experimental study were twofold: to explore some basic political attitudes of a small group of Catholic priests ministering in a largely rural part of Northern Ireland and also to establish broadly the extent to which the priest realised his potential leadership role by becoming politically involved in two significant parish problems—the allocation of local authority housing and the unemployment issue. The main insights gained and inferences drawn (some for further testing) can be listed as follows:

1. The priest shares a common sense of national identity with lay Catholics. This factor, however, also serves to separate the priest and his flock from the bulk of his Protestant neighbours.

2. All respondents "disapproved" of the constitutional status of Northern Ireland but there was some evidence of an ability and willingness to compromise between the extremes of an independent united Ireland and the existing union with Britain. However, identification with anti-Unionist parties was diffused and extremely weak.

3. While the priests were acutely aware of the problems cited as political issues there was a general reluctance by them to take on a leadership role and initiate and carry the burden of agitation. There was little the priest could do regarding the unemployment issue, not being able to create jobs, and in housing there were few pressures for him to act in non-Unionist areas. In Unionist areas, however, his intervention was in response to strong local stimuli and was cautious and spasmodic rather than sustained.

4. While these inferences are drawn from one limited area only the behaviour of priests elsewhere in Northern Ireland at that time was probably consistent with this. In short the priest was prominent in social affairs but was not much concerned with pressure group activities or politics except to state views and intervene on occasions in the housing problem when local stimuli were sufficiently strong.

In retrospect the study captured certain political attitudes and behaviour patterns of a small group of priests just prior to the opening of the civil rights campaign at what was probably a significant turning-point in the history of Northern Ireland. In the interests of research, copies of the questionnaire and introductory letter are appended.

Dublin.

APPENDIX A

Letter of Introduction

University of Strathclyde
School of Arts and Social Studies
Glasgow C.1.

1 The Diamond,
Ballyneagh.
Date: September/October 1968.

Dear Father X,

I am a post-graduate student from the social studies department of the above university and am currently conducting a small survey among priests in this area. This project is in connection with my Master's degree thesis. I am collecting data which will help to build up a picture of the social role of the priest in his community.

In planning the project I have had advice and assistance from a number of priests in Northern Ireland. I am hoping to cover this area within the next two weeks or so and

would like to see you personally within that time if it could be conveniently arranged. I would very much appreciate having your views and comments. To save you the bother of writing I would like to ring you within the next few days to see if a mutually convenient meeting could be arranged. Needless to say any information collected at such interviews remains entirely confidential.

In case you may wonder I would like to assure you that as the project was planned last Easter it is in no way connected with the most recent Papal encyclical.*

Yours sincerely,
PATRICK A. FAHY.

*Author's note: This was a direct reference to the Papal Encyclical Humanae Vitae which was published in the Summer of 1968 and had stimulated wide, and sometimes controversial discussion some weeks prior to launching this project.

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire

1. *Where were you born?* ....

   (a) Where did you live mostly as a child?...

2. *What was your father's occupation when you were growing up?*......................
   (Rephrase for father substitute)

3. *Which seminary did you attend?*...

   (a) What age were you at ordination? ....

   (b) Have you ever worked other than as a priest?.......................................

   (c) What degrees if any do you hold?..

4. *What is your age now?* ....

5. *Which of these terms best describes the way you usually think of yourself?* (*Tick reponse*).
      British
      Irish
      Ulsterman
      Sometimes British/Sometimes Irish
      Anglo-Irish
      Other

6. *There has always been a lot of controversy about the constitutional position of Northern Ireland. On balance do you approve or disapprove of it?*

> Approve
> Disapprove
> Other.

If approval

(a) *And why do you say that?* . . . .

If disapproval

(a) *Why do you say that?* . . . .

(b) *And what would you like to see in its place?* . . . .

7. *Generally speaking what political party do you usually think of yourself as supporting?*

. . . .

8. *Thinking now about Northern Ireland what do you feel to be the biggest problem troubling the people of Northern Ireland to-day?* (Probe)

9. *And what do you feel to be the biggest problem troubling the Catholic community in Northern Ireland today?* . . . .

10. *Finally within your own parish, what is the biggest problem facing the Catholic community?* (Probe)

11. *One hears a lot these days about the problems of housing and unemployment in Northern Ireland—are these problems in your parish?*

> Housing . . . . Unemployment . . . .

12. *Do you get involved in your parishioners housing problems?*

. . . *If Yes* (a) *How do you go about this?* . . . . . .

If No (b) *Why is that?* (Probe)

13. *Do you get involved in their unemployment problems?*

. *If Yes* (a) *How do you go about this?* . . .

If No (b) *Why is that?* (Probe)