Living in two worlds: A study of the variety and characteristics of church life and policies in selected Church of England parishes

Thesis

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LIVING IN TWO WORLDS:

A study of the variety and characteristics of church life and policies in selected Church of England parishes.

A thesis submitted to The Open University
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Interdisciplinary Social Sciences)
by
Colin Hill, B.Sc.
on 29th February, 1988

VOLUME 3
(of 4 volumes)
Chapters VII to IX
Chapter Seven

PARISHES IN NEW TOWNS

Diagram 6:1

Outline of Research Process

General Observations and Ripon/Suffield Survey. (I)

- Discussion of Theory
- Secularization (III)

Existing typologies and models. (II)

Research (IV)

- Primary Questions
- Secondary Questions

Postal (V) Survey

Preliminary Modelling (VI)

Sample Screening

Interviews (VI)

(Roman numerals in brackets indicate chapter numbers)

New Town Parishes (VII)

(2) Role of Parish (VIII)

(3) Well-being of Congregation (IX)

FINAL MODEL (X)

Page 181
1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold: firstly, to examine the nature of the priorities of the church in New Town parishes. Of particular concern is the evidence relating to whether or not there is a better correspondence between activities and priorities in New Town churches than in other churches. (2)

Secondly, we wish to look at the distinctive nature of church life in New Towns which was noted in Chapter Five. (3) We examine this further to see what particular conclusions can be drawn.

To accomplish these two purposes we shall examine the distinctive features of church life in New Towns, consider the nature of priorities in New Town churches, examine levels of sacred and secular orientated activity, note the characteristics of New Town church attendance and membership, and finally try to draw general conclusions about the 'typical' New Town church.

2. Distinctive Features of New Town Churches

The list of the variables which were significantly associated with whether or not a parish was in a New Town is contained in Table 5:2. (4) As was noted in Chapter Five, the 'New Town variable' is remarkably heavily associated with other factors. (5) This means that whether or not a parish is in a New Town makes more difference to what is happening in the parish than almost any other feature under consideration. These differences are summarised in Table 7:1.
### Table 7:1

**Distinctive features of New Town Churches**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Associated Variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Clergy have been shorter time in parish</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Urban parish with less demolition and more new housing</td>
<td>22, 3, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Lower levels of sacred orientated activity</td>
<td>6, 9, 10, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Lower levels of secular orientated activity</td>
<td>12, 14, (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Possibly lower church membership</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) Higher growth in attendance and possibly in membership</td>
<td>21 (20)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: where variable number is in brackets, the association falls short of the 5% significance level.

Some of the features associated with New Town parishes are what might have been expected, namely item (b) in Table 7:1: New Towns are urban, have more new housing and are less likely to have experienced much demolition of housing. Yet there is no obvious overall pattern to the other distinctive characteristics of New Town parishes. We shall be looking at these characteristics in this chapter.

One possibility is that these features of New Town parishes simply reflect the fact that a large number of new houses have been built in New Towns. Thus, non-New Town parishes with large proportions of new housing were examined to see if they had the same features as New Town parishes. (6) Table 5:20 showed quite clearly that they did not. New Town parishes seem to be different from other parishes, including other parishes with large amounts of new housing.
3. Priorities in New Town Parishes

(a) Consistency of Priorities and Activities

(i) Indications from the Postal Survey

It was expected that there would have been a consistency between priorities and activities in New Town churches. In Section 1 above we recalled the question about whether or not the church making a new start in a New Town resulted in its doing the things which were felt important rather than following the patterns of the past. We noticed earlier that there is no evidence to show that this is the case. Indeed, New Town parishes show less consistency between priorities and activities than other parishes.

There is no significant association between sacred priorities and sacred activities nor between secular priorities and sacred activities in either New Town or non-New Town parishes, as Tables A1:43, A1:44, A1:45 and A1:46 in Appendix I show. Neither are there any associations in New Town parishes either between sacred priorities and secular activities, or between secular priorities and secular activities, as Tables 7:2 and 7:3 show.

Table 7:2 (code 14/15 NT)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sacred Priorities and Secular Activities in New Town Parishes</th>
<th>Nos. of parishes</th>
<th>Sacred Priorities</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secular Activities Low</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

chi square = 0.545 (p = 0.460) (no significant association)

Table 7:3 (code 14/16 NT)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secular Priorities and Activities in New Town Parishes</th>
<th>Nos. of parishes</th>
<th>Secular Priorities</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secular Activities Low</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

chi square = 0.084 (p = 0.759) (no significant association)
When we look at Tables 7:4 and 7:5, they present a different picture. They demonstrate a large negative association between sacred priorities and secular activities in non-New Town parishes and a large positive association between secular priorities and activities in these parishes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7:4 (code 14/15 H)</th>
<th>Table 7:5 (code 14/16 H)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sacred Priorities and Secular Activities in non-New Town Parishes</td>
<td>Secular Priorities and Activities in non-New Town Parishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nos. of parishes Low High Total</td>
<td>Nos. of parishes Low High Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular Activities Low 7 20 27</td>
<td>Secular Activities Low 20 7 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High 25 14 39</td>
<td>High 14 25 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 32 34 66</td>
<td>Total 34 32 66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chi square = 9.310 (p = 0.002) (significant negative association)</td>
<td>chi square = 9.310 (p = 0.002) (significant positive association)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tables 7:2 - 5 show that non-New Town parishes with large amounts of secular orientated activity are very likely to have clergy with high secular priorities and low sacred priorities. Whereas in New Town parishes, there is no such relationship between activities and clergy priorities. All of this adds up to there being less association between priorities and activities in New Towns than in other places.

We expected that the 'clean slate' of the New Town situation would free clergy to implement schemes and projects they thought important. The opposite is true: something in New Towns prevents clergy implementing schemes and projects they think important. We now move on to see what light is shed on this finding by the interviews in selected parishes.
(II) **Indications from the Interviews (8)**

Interviews were carried out in four New Town parishes: Cattrill, Bourne Keaton, Chalton and West Kirby.

The vicar of Cattrill commented: "I'm very much of a butterfly". This remark came in the middle of a discussion about priorities, and the incumbent meant that he flitted from one interesting opportunity to another, without seeing particular things as crucially important.

The vicar of Bourne Keaton talked proudly about a three year parish plan, but his churchwardens didn't mention it once, despite being questioned about priorities. Here was an incumbent with priorities which lay leaders seemed not to acknowledge or at least not to have in the forefront of their minds. This was part of this division between the vicar and the lay leaders, and perhaps laity in general. The existence of the two (rival?) parish magazines and the vicar ringing the church bell twice daily ("They don't like it, but it will do them good", he said) were similar indications.

In Chalton the churchwardens, in particular, were preoccupied with their struggle to develop ecumenical relationships. This preoccupation prevented them from looking at what other things were important.

Chalton and Bourne Keaton had problems about small congregations, and this prevented any self-confidence about addressing parish needs. Chalton and West Kirby both had financial problems, although this didn't prevent West Kirby from initiating very adventurous community work. Clergy and churchwardens of West Kirby were clear about a priority to concentrate on 'spiritual' things, but they didn't seem clear about how they were going to
put that priority into practice.

These New Town parishes can be contrasted with the two classic suburban parishes in the interview sample. In both South Wiston and East Ecton priorities were explicitly acknowledged: they had been thought through and were being pursued. The review of parish life carried out in East Ecton was quite different from Bourne Keaton's three-year plan. In East Ecton, vicar and churchwardens produced identical pictures about the balance between 'praying' and 'caring', and the churchwarden, not the vicar, was the one who took great pride in showing me the presentation of the review. In South Wiston and East Ecton the church could sit down, and from a position of strength, decide what it ought to be doing. After making the decisions, the resources were available to carry them out.

Thus the interviews reinforced the conclusion that New Town parishes put priorities into practice less than other parishes. This is more due to their inability to realise their priorities than to their not having any priorities. We shall return to this at the end of this chapter.

(b) The Nature of Priorities

New Towns are distinctive kinds of communities, being explicitly planned and deliberately developed. The evidence suggests that New Town churches are also distinctive, as we noted in section 2 above. This might lead us to expect that the priorities of the church in New Towns might also be distinctive in some way. Church life in New Towns is quite different, and since clergy can have a range of emphasis in their priorities, we expect the priorities of New Town clergy to be different. Yet we discover that they are not.
There is, in fact, a singular similarity between priorities of clergy in New Towns and in non-New Towns. (9) This would be less surprising if clergy priorities were, always and everywhere, pretty much the same. As shown in Chapter Eight, they are not, (10) although there is a strong tendency for daily worship, preparation for worship and private prayer to be top priorities. (11)

If clergy priorities can vary, it is remarkable that a major contextual factor, such as being in a New Town, is not related to any variation.

The only hints of differences in clergy priorities in the New Towns are that they don't seem to determine parish activities and that there might be more of an emphasis on corporate prayer than on private prayer amongst New Town clergy. (12)

On this evidence the most satisfactory explanation is that clergy come to New Towns with their own set of priorities, and that these are unaffected by moving into very distinctive communities with a distinctive church life. This is well illustrated by the fact that none of the four New Town clergy interviewed mentioned the context of the New Town as affecting his priorities.

4. Sacred and Secular Orientated Activity in New Towns

The levels of sacred and secular orientated activity in New Town parishes are described quite simply as less than in other parishes. (13) Of all the measures of sacred and secular activity, only clerical sacred orientated activity, the sacred use of time by clergy and the number of secular charities supported are not statistically demonstrated to be less in New
Towns. The same is not true in other new housing areas and is another distinctive New Town feature. (14)

An obvious influence could be simply that New town churches are smaller. Table 7.1 in section 2 above shows the possibility of nominal membership being lower in New Towns. Yet the association between New Town parishes and lower membership falls short of statistical significance, and there is no indication that attendance is lower in New Town parishes. It does not seem, therefore, that low levels of secular and sacred activity are due to the congregations in New Towns being small. We look to the interviews in the New Town parishes to illuminate the situation.

West Kirby did not seem like any kind of 'typical' parish - New Town or otherwise. There were secular orientated activities in evidence, yet the parish was only 6th highest out of 13 in levels of secular activity. (15) What was of note was the very firm statement by the churchwardens that West Kirby was "a parish which can't manage without leadership", by which they meant leadership from the clergy.

Bourne Keaton was a troubled parish. Worship was the predominant activity, perhaps partly because little else was happening. The incumbent did not see himself there to meet expectations of the church members. "I refuse to be a fund-raiser" came as a heartfelt assertion of resistance to that pressure.

Mention has already been made of the blockage effect of Chalton's frustrated ecumenical endeavours and of the high movement of population in the parish. This movement clearly inhibited attempts to establish parish activities and to build up the size of the congregation.
Cattrill did give the impression of being a busy little church. The community was newer than in any of the other three New Town parishes and the church was trying to pick up and respond to the needs of new arrivals in the parish.

With the exception of Cattrill, the impression of the New Town parishes was a lack of momentum. Everything that happened in the life of the church seemed to require a lot of energy, especially from the clergy, both to make it happen and keep it going. Whereas, in other parishes, the machine just needed a drop of oil from time to time, in the New Town parishes people had to keep pedalling!

5. Membership and Attendance
We have already noted the growth in attendance of New Town churches. (16) This was again not attributable simply to large amounts of new housing. We shall discuss the growth of New Town churches in the context of the total data about church strength in Chapter Nine. (17)

Our purpose here is to reflect on the small network of items appearing to relate to church strength in New Town parishes. These items include attendance growing more than in other churches, attendance levels not significantly different, but membership appearing to be lower. (18) (19) As we shall note below, this growth in attendance seems to relate a search for belonging in the rootless population of the New Town.

A further item in the network is the relationship between higher levels of ecumenical activity and growth in attendance and membership which we shall discuss in Chapter Nine. (20) We shall see that over the whole postal
survey sample, there is an association between higher levels of ecumenical activity and increases in both attendance and membership.

In the survey as a whole, a high growth in attendance is almost always associated with high growth in membership. (21) It is, therefore, surprising that there is a lack of a clear statistical association between increase of membership and New Town parishes. The network of associations between ecumenism, New Town parishes, increases in attendance and increases in membership are shown in Diagram 7:2. The feature of note is the obvious missing link between New Town parishes and a high increase in membership.

Diagram 7:2

Associations between Church Growth, ecumenical activity and New Town parishes
(Note the lack of association between high increase in membership and New Town Parishes)

At this point it becomes important to understand the distinction between the closely associated variables of membership and attendance. The index of 'nominal membership' is a composite figure made up of electoral roll numbers, Easter communicants and Christmas communicants. Whether or not individuals join a church electoral roll is influenced, most of all, by the idiosyncrasies of how any parish conducts its revision. Some churches send visitors to existing members to see if they wish to join the electoral roll when it is being revised from scratch. Other churches simply wait for people to ask for the forms. Varieties of procedures across this spectrum
obviously tend towards different eventual sizes of electoral roll! Another factor, however, is traditional loyalty, with parishioners continuing on the roll long after they have ceased to attend church: this is especially true of elderly and housebound people. The desire of people who live outside a parish to be married in the parish church also affects the size of electoral role of the more picturesque ancient churches. Such factors as these are largely absent in New Towns.

Attendance at church on major feast days, especially Christmas, is also very dependent on traditional loyalties. These loyalties are not quickly established nor easily eradicated. In a New Town they are clearly less likely to be prevalent than in established communities.

This suggests that the lack of clear evidence for a high growth in church membership in New Town parishes is due to the relatively small influence of tradition and traditional loyalties in these parishes.

6. **Conclusions about the New Town Church**

(a) **The Non-Civic Church**

In the discussion on secularisation in Chapter Three, we drew attention to religion as a separate category in modern society. In particular, we noted the way in which this process was influenced by social differentiation, pluralism, the 'privatisation' of religion, and the shift from 'community' to 'association'.

Within the New Town, the church has not inherited the integration of its life with the rest of the community. From the very first, expectations are that the church is a specialist religious organisation. In established
communities, elements of the traditional understanding of the church as part of some total organic community remain and, to some extent, inhibit the separation of the church from wider society. In the New Town the church is clearly not 'basic' to the community. (24) This being 'basic' to the community is fundamental to the role of the civic church.

We have already observed that the New Town church seemed to be distinctive in that it was the antithesis of the civic church. (25) Thus our theoretical understanding of likely influences on the New Town church confirms the conclusion tentatively drawn from the results of the postal questionnaire: the New Town church is a distinctively 'non-civic' church.

In the interviews, two of the New Town parishes demonstrated this. West Kirby had an older church building and large churchyard, pre-dating the building of the new town. Yet there was no physical centre to the community of which that ancient church could be part. Signs to the 'West Kirby' district of the town actually point away from the church in at least one place, without pointing to any shopping centre or public building as the centre of the district. The obvious symbolic geographic centre is the church building, but not apparently obvious to planners locating direction signs. They seem to ignore it.

We have already mentioned the high movement of population in Chalton. This clearly militates against the church developing the role of a focus of civic life. More significant still was the local perception of the church building. Chalton was a parish with a modern church building in a newly developed district centre. Residents of the area will, however, sometimes point across the fields to the spire of a redundant church when asked for
directions to the church. The old church has been closed for over ten years, and none but a miniscule proportion of the population of this newly built area can have had the opportunity of worshipping there. Yet they recognise the old redundant church more easily as 'the church' than they do the modern building in the district centre. This transient population have little awareness of the active church in their midst.

In the New Town the church is not a focus of civic identity.

Despite this, those who are attracted into membership of the New Town church may well be attracted because of their search for 'belonging'. People moving into a New Town often come looking for some idealised new community: a place where the community ties of a bygone age can be recreated in the context of attractive modern housing and the latest recreational facilities. We shall consider this search for belonging in Chapter Nine in relation to the suburban church. (26) We shall note the success of the suburban church in attracting people to public worship, the kind of success demonstrated by East Ecton. The New Town parishes are also successful in terms of the growth of attendance. They are not, however, successful in maintaining a high level of either secular or sacred orientated activities. Neither are they strong enough to be able to make decisions about priorities in the life of the local church: for the moment, their priority is surviving.

(b) Summary and Overview

We have arrived at six principal conclusions about the life of Church of England churches in New Towns. These are:-

(1) That church life is quite distinctive in New Towns; distinct from other parishes with large amounts of new housing as well as from
established housing areas.

(ii) That, despite our expectations to the contrary, there is, if anything, less consistency between the emphasis in the life of the local church and the priorities of the incumbent in New Towns than elsewhere.

(iii) That there are lower levels of both sacred and secular orientated activity in New Town parishes than in other parishes.

(iv) That church attendance is growing more rapidly in New Towns than in other places (including other areas with large amounts of new housing).

(v) That, despite the high increase in attendance in New Town churches, there is no clear evidence of notably high increase in membership.

(vi) That the New Town church tends towards the antithesis of a civic church.

The overall picture of the New Town church is, therefore, of a distinctive church, made distinctive by the building of a total new community. This building of community involves social planning and community development to a much greater extent than do conventional housing developments. In the midst of this the New Town church increases its attendance. Yet the church lacks the support and the loyalties which other churches inherit because they have been 'basic' to their communities in the past. In this situation church leaders, clergy and laity, have to put their energies into surviving rather than planning for the future or developing a wide range of sacred or secular orientated activities.

If the population of the New Town parish has the same socio-economic make-up as the suburban parish, then the New Town church might well develop into a
suburban church. This will be made possible as a proportion of families put down their roots in the parish, allowing traditional loyalties to develop and an element of stable lay leadership to develop. It still remains to be seen, however, if the fact that the New Town church has never been 'basic' continues to have an effect in a generation or so. Will New Town churches develop a civic aspect to their life or will most Church of England churches become decidedly non-civic, as the patterns from the past have less and less influence?
Chapter 7 - Notes

1. Some material contained in this chapter was published in Bailey (1986) p.38f.

2. See Chapter IV of this study, sections 3(b)(ii) (page 89) and implicit hypothesis III in section 3(c). (page 91)

3. Section 2(c)(i). (page 110)

4. See Chapter V section 2(e)(i). (page 119)

5. Chapter V section 2(b)(iii). (page 109)

6. Chapter V section 2(e)(vi). (page 130)

7. See Tables 5:17 and 5:18 in Chapter V section 2(e)(iv). (page 126f)

8. Of the thirteen parishes which were selected for investigation by interview, 4 were in New Towns. This is a very small sample from which to draw conclusions about all New Town parishes, yet material from the interviews illustrates and illuminates issues raised by the results of the postal survey, the sample for which included 60 New Town parishes.


10. See Tables AI:24 and AI:25 in Appendix I, section 4(a), (page AI-31) and Diagram 8:2 in Chapter VIII section 2. (page 202)

11. See Chapter V, section 2(d)(iv), Table 5:8. (page 117)

12. See Chapter V, section 2(e)(iii), and Table 5:16. (page 126)

13. Table 5:19 in Chapter V section 2(e)(v) (page 128) shows this quite clearly.

14. See section 2 above. (page 182)

15. See Appendix II 2(c)(i), Table AII-3. (page AII-12)

16. In Chapter V section 2(e)(ii), Table 5:11. (page 121)

17. See Chapter IX section 2(d)(iii). (page 261)
18. See section 2 and Table 7:1 above in Chapter VII; Chapter V section 2(e)(i) and Table 5:2; (page 108) and Chapter IX section 2(d)(iii) Tables 9:16 (page 262) and 9:17. (page 263)

19. The word "appearing" in this sentence indicates that, although statistical analysis shows some correlation, chi-square tests do not show an association significant at the 5% level.

20. See Chapter IX section 2(d)(iii). (page 261)

21. Table AI-47 in Appendix I section 4(c) (page AI-35) shows a high level of association between high levels of growth in membership and attendance. The rank correlation between these was 0.746 (Spearman's correlation coefficient) and product moment correlation 0.788.

22. Chapter III section 4(d). (page 68)

23. Chapter III section 2(b). (page 55)

24. See Chapter III section 4(c). (page 66)

25. See Chapter VI, section 1(c)(iii). (page 153)

26. See Chapter IX section 2(d)(iv). (page 264)
Chapter Eight

THE CLERGY

Diagram 8:1

Outlines of Research Process

General Observations
and Macion/Shelford Survey

(II)

Existing
typologies
and models.

(II)

Discussion
of

Seminarisation

(III)

Research

Questions

(IV)

Primary

Secondary

Secondary

Survey

Survey

Postal

Postal

Secondary

Questions

Questions

Preliminary

Modelling

(VI)

Sampling

Screening

Interviews

(VI)

(1) How faith declines (VII)

(2) Role of clergy (VIII)

(3) Well-bing of congregation (IX)

FINAL MODEL: (X)

(Notes: numerals in brackets indicate chapter numbers)
VIII THE CLERGY

1. Introduction

(a) The Purpose of this Chapter

This chapter examines two issues. The first issue is how the clergy in particular respond to the changed situation of the church, which has been brought about by secularisation: namely, the perception of religion as a quite separate category of activity from the rest of life. (1) The second issue is the overall role of the clergy in the local church.

After noting the range of information which we have about the clergy, this chapter will:

(i) examine sacred and secular orientations of clergy priorities;
(ii) consider what factors are related to these priorities;
(iii) see how clergy priorities and other clerical influences relate to the emphases apparent in the life of the local parish;
(iv) compare clergy and lay perceptions revealed in the interviews in the thirteen parishes;
(v) gather together conclusions about the response of clergy to the contemporary situation of the church and about the overall influence of the clergy.

(b) Range of Information about the Role of the Clergy

There have been three points during the course of this study at which particular attention has been given to the role of the clergy.
Firstly, whilst looking at the underlying theoretical issues, a typology of leadership of religious groups was suggested. This was Priestly/Exemplary/Prophetic/Democratic and it is helpful in understanding the different kinds of leadership which exists in religious groups. (2) This chapter will not be directly concerned with considering this typology: the principal discussion of the typology is left until Chapter Ten, in which the refined model of Church of England churches will be expounded, and the insights set out below related to the whole model at the same time.

Secondly, the postal survey provided information about a number of "clerical variables". (3) These are:

- The number of years the clergyman has been in the parish.
- The clerical sacred activity score.
- The clerical sacred orientated use of time.
- The sacred priority score.
- The secular priority score.
- The clusters of priorities.
- The year of ordination of the clergyman.
- The churchmanship of the clergyman's theological college.
- The extreme of churchmanship of the theological college.

Information about these and how they relate to other variables derived from the postal survey, form that survey's contribution to this chapter.

Thirdly, the extended interviews in the thirteen parishes also produced data about the role of clergy. This data is used to develop and expand information from the postal survey. It is particularly significant in
enabling us to compare perceptions of the clergy with those of the laity.

2. Sacred and Secular Orientations of Clergy Priorities

The question in the postal survey about priorities (4) was asked in order to investigate both the nature of clergy priorities and the consistency between these priorities and parish activities. In this section we are concerned with the nature of the priorities.

The distribution of priority scores is shown in Diagram 8:2. (5) The characteristics of the distribution and the shape of the diagram shows that the distribution would tend towards normality for the whole population, but with the mean/median towards the sacred orientated end. (6) This indicates a distribution of a range of priorities, but with the whole range tending towards sacred orientation.

Diagram 8:2

Distribution of Clergy Priority Scores

[Diagram showing the distribution of clergy priority scores with a range from totally secular to totally sacred orientated priorities.

Page 202]
Whilst Diagram 8:2 shows some tendency towards clergy priorities being sacred orientated, consideration of the highest priorities alone gives a more dramatic picture. Diagram 5:2 and Table 5:8 in Chapter Five demonstrate this. (7) The four most common top priorities chosen from the list offered in the questionnaire were all sacred orientated: they were private prayer, preparation for Sunday worship, saying the Daily Office or celebrating a daily eucharist, and the private study of scripture. This picture was confirmed in the interviews: nine out of thirteen clergy interviewed put daily worship as one of the two "Inviolable" items in their diary. (8)

These sacred orientated items are those which matter most to the clergy. Yet the frequency distribution of all priority scores shows that, for the majority of clergy, some secular items also matter. Indeed, only two clergy marked all the secular orientated items as "relatively unimportant"; these were the two whose sacred priority scores were 1.0.

The same general picture emerged in the study in the Dioceses of Ripon and Sheffield. In that instance "Daily Worship" and "Preparation for Sunday" were the top scoring priorities. (9)

All of this is exactly what we were led to expect in our discussion on secularisation, when we noted the pressures on clergy to concentrate on the unique parts of their role such as leading worship. (10)

The analysis of clusters also demonstrates that worship prevails more than any other feature of priorities. It shows an even division between those emphasising private prayer and those emphasising corporate worship. (11)
To summarise: Private daily devotions is by far the most frequent top priority for clergy. Priorities tend to be sacred orientated rather than secular orientated, with sacred orientated priorities divided between private prayer and corporate worship. Most clergy still do, however, attach some importance to secular orientated matters such as instigating community projects and keeping well informed about a wide variety of matters.

3. Factors related to Clergy Priorities

In this section we consider three factors which are related to clergy priorities. Firstly, we see how priorities of the clergy are associated with activities of the local church, or, to put it another way, the consistency between priorities and activities.

Secondly, we examine ways in which the churchmanship of the theological college at which the clergyman was trained seems to be related to both clergy priorities and church activities.

Thirdly, we note the much more minor issue of the relationship between the length of service of the clergy and clergy priorities.

(a) Consistency between Priorities and Activities

(i) Prior expectations

The survey of parishes in the Dioceses of Ripon and Sheffield shows a remarkable lack of consistency between the priorities of the clergy and the emphases in the activities of their churches. (12) There might be an expectation that parishes of clergy with high secular priorities have high levels of secular activities, and parishes of clergy with high levels of
sacred priorities have high levels of sacred activity, but the results of the Ripon/Sheffield research indicated that this was not the case. That study suggested that there were other factors than the wishes of the vicar determining the activities of the local church.

(ii) **Postal Survey Results**

The postal survey of this study showed that high sacred priorities by the clergy were not associated with high levels of sacred activity in the parish. This result was the same as that of Ripon/Sheffield survey. The result was, however, quite different for secular priorities and activities. Clergy with high secular orientated priorities have parishes with larger amounts of secular orientated activity. The relationships between the orientation of clergy priorities and parish activities is summarised in Table 5:7 in Chapter Five.

We conclude from this that the amount of secular orientated activity in a parish is predominantly influenced by the priority given to these activities by the incumbent. The level of sacred orientated activity in a parish is not, however, determined by the incumbent's priorities. Something else is influencing levels of sacred orientated activities.

(b) **Churchmanship**

The use of churchmanship labels was mentioned at the beginning of this study. Since there is a popular perception of differing churchmanship traditions being an important feature in the life of the Church of England, their influence is investigated here.
The felt significance of churchmanship

The interviews with clergy and laity bore out the notion that churchmanship is important in Church of England parishes. Laity, in particular, made repeated references to churchmanship. Churchwardens of Fieldsend and Polton, for example, both spoke with pride of their distinctive traditions, churchmanship was clearly an issue in Upper Bagley and the Incumbent of West Kirby spoke about his influence in the tradition of the parish.

Table 8:1 shows that the churchwardens generally had a clear idea of how important churchmanship was to their incumbent. Six out of the thirteen sets of wardens estimated the situation correctly and only one produced an opposite response from the incumbent. This latter was in West Kirby where the incumbent had been introducing catholic practices with which the parish was not entirely familiar.

Table 8:1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>Clergy Response</th>
<th>Churchwarden's estimate of clergy response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Kirby</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalton</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bourne Keaton</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattrill</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osgarthur</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Wiston</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Bagley</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Ecton</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polton</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topley Parva</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fieldsend</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge Town</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langby</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Keys: 1 = "very important that colleague came from college of same tradition"  
2 = "moderately important ...."  
3 = "hardly important at all ...."  
- = unable to judge.
From this general observation about the significance of churchmanship, we move on to look at indications about the relationship of churchmanship to other features of church life.

(ii) Churchmanship and sacred/secular orientation

The postal survey did reveal some ways in which sacred/secular orientations of clergy and parishes were related to the churchmanship tradition of the colleges at which the clergy trained. A number of these relationships have already been demonstrated in the analysis of postal survey results. (17)

The more notable of the associations between churchmanship and other variables are:

I Middle to low churchmanship was associated with low levels of sacred orientated activity. (18)

II Central churchmanship is associated with low sacred priority levels and high secular priority level. (19)
III Extremes of churchmanship, very low and very high, are associated with high levels of corporate sacred activity (20): but not high levels of clerical sacred orientated activity. (21) This means that clergy of extreme churchmanship tend to be in parishes where there are a large number of services and prayer groups, but they do not themselves spend a particularly large part of their time involved in these things.

IV Very low churchmanship is associated with high levels of sacred orientated priority and low levels of secular orientated priority. (22) This confirms the view expressed by Gilbert who writes of the distinctiveness of the evangelicals within the Church of England (Gilbert (1980) p.144). Towler describes "puritans" and "anti-puritans" amongst Church of England ordinands, with the "puritans" being largely made up of evangelicals, and the "anti-puritans" a mixture of liberals and anglo-catholics (Towler (1969) pp. 112-115). Towler and Coxon refer again to this division, describing the puritans as "more conventionally religious, conformist, relatively disinterested in the world beyond the church, and broadly, though not exclusively, evangelicals". Towler & Coxon (1979) p.114). Amongst these "puritans" are those whom this research is identifying as of very low churchmanship with decidedly sacred, rather than secular, priorities.

The associations between churchmanship and sacred/secular orientations are summarised in Table 8:2
Table 8:2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Churchmanship</th>
<th>Characteristic orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very low</td>
<td>High sacred priorities; low secular priorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately low</td>
<td>Low sacred activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>Low sacred activities; low sacred priorities; high secular priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately high</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very high</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremes (very low and</td>
<td>High corporate sacred activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and very high)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results from the interviews tended to confirm the conclusion that parishes with extremes of churchmanship are more sacred orientated than other parishes; although "distinctive" churchmanship would be a more appropriate expression in describing particular parishes whose clergy and churchwardens were interviewed. In Table 8:3 below, there are four parishes in which the churchwardens and clergy responses are most consistent: these are Upper Bagley, Polton, Fieldsend and East Ecton. East Ecton would be expected to be amongst this group since there was such clarity about policy in this parish. (23) The other three parishes are the only three in which the incumbent and wardens were agreed that the churchmanship of a prospective colleague was "very important". (24) The three parishes, Polton, Fieldsend and Upper Bagley, are ranked respectively as follows for sacred orientation: Activities: 2, 1 and 1; Priorities: 1, 2 and 7. These high rankings of churches of distinctive churchmanship illustrate the tendency of such churches to emphasise sacred orientated matters.
All of this information about the influence of churchmanship points to the incumbent's churchmanship predominantly influencing levels of sacred orientated activities in the local church.

(c) Length of Service of Clergy and Clergy Priorities

A different feature of clergy priorities relates to differences between clergy who were more, or less, recently ordained and between clergy who were more, or less, recently appointed to their parishes.

Clergy who had been longer in their parishes tended to have higher sacred priorities and to be in parishes with more sacred orientated activities.

(25) Thus more established clergy were in more sacred orientated parishes. Yet clergy who were more recently ordained also served in parishes which, if anything, had more sacred orientated activities (26), and these were clergy who also tended to have been in their parish for a shorter length of time.

(27)

A much more detailed study of a larger sample might reveal that clergy ordained both recently and some time ago are in parishes with higher levels of sacred orientation compared with clergy ordained for a medium length of time.

The only real significance of this for us is as a small illustration of another clergy factor being related to what is happening in the local church. This will be referred to again in the concluding section of this chapter.
4. Clerical Predispositions and the Orientation of Church Activities

In looking at the consistency between clergy priorities and emphases in church activities, levels of secular priority were seen to be related to levels of secular activity. The clergyman whose priorities are secular orientated tends to have a parish whose activities are secular orientated. This was not true in respect of sacred orientation. (28)

Sacred orientation is, as has been seen, related to extremes of churchmanship. This was apparent from both the postal survey (29) and from the interviews. (30) Hence it is still a clerical factor, the churchmanship of the incumbent's theological college, which is associated with levels of sacred activity.

In concrete terms this means that whether a parish does or does not engage in various community welfare programmes is associated with whether or not the incumbent thinks that such things are important. In addition, whether a parish does or does not have large numbers of Bible Study groups or midweek services is associated with whether or not the incumbent went to an extreme evangelical or catholic theological college.

We cannot demonstrate precise causal relationships here: for example, it is not entirely clear whether clergy of extreme churchmanship cause parishes to have high levels of sacred activity or whether high levels of sacred activity in a parish attract clergy of extreme churchmanship to become incumbent. In section 6 of this chapter we shall consider the whole range of evidence about the overall role of the clergy; this ought to provide some clues about whether clergy predispositions or emphases in parish life
5. Lay and Clerical Perceptions

Table 8:3  13 Parishes:  
% of corresponding responses in interview replies of churchwardens and incumbents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>Number of interview question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Kirby</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalton</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bourne Keaton</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catrill</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osgerth</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Wiston</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Bagley</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Ecton</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polton</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topley Parva</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fieldsend</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge Town</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langby</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave.%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(All rounded to nearest whole number)

Key to question number:
1. Groups to which incumbent belongs.  4b. Good things resulting from clergy initiative
2. Proportion of clergy time on      4c. Good things resulting from lay initiative
   non-churchgoers                  5. Things desired to be different
3. Inviolable items in clergy diary 6. Areas of influence of incumbent
4a. Most important event/activities 8. Changes in parish in 5 years
   in life of local church

Clergy priorities and the relationship between these and church life and
between churchmanship and church life have been considered. Attention is
now directed towards the question of how the views of clergy relate to the views of laity about priorities in the parish.

In some parishes in which interviews took place there were clear differences between how the clergy saw things and how churchwardens saw things: this was especially obvious in Topley Parva and Bourne Keaton. For the most part there was, however, a good sense of clergy and wardens getting on well with each other at a personal level and working well together. This comfortable impression of clergy and laity sharing perceptions is shattered by Table 8:3 which shows a major disparity between lay and clerical views. This is particularly evident from the average levels of agreement in individual parishes (row averages) and individual interview questions (column averages) such as question 4c.

The disparity between the responses given by clergy and laity is quite remarkable. Looking at the columns of Table 8:3, Bourne Keaton shows the lowest level of agreement between clergy and laity: this was expected since they admitted to disagreements in the interviews. Chalton is the next lowest, and, again, this is no surprise since the churchwardens were unaware of much of what the incumbent did. Note has already been taken of Upper Bagley, East Ecton, Fieldsend and Polton as the parishes with most consistency between clerical and lay views. Yet even in East Ecton, with the carefully worked out and presented strategy, there is only 44% correspondence between the Incumbent's and the churchwarden's responses. Looking at the columns of Table 8:3 some even more striking features emerge:

Question 1 (groups to which incumbent belongs): There is only 31%
correspondence - even the churchwardens don't know much about the groups to which the vicar belongs outside of the parish organisation.

Question 2 (Clergy time spent on non-church goers): There is a 56% correspondence, the highest - churchwardens are more aware of how the clergyman divided his time between church members and others.

Question 3 (Inviolable Items in the clergy diary): Only two sets of wardens were 100% accurate in their answer, six had some idea about inviolable commitments of the vicar, five had no idea.

Question 4 (Important church events and activities and good things resulting from clerical and lay initiatives): There was little agreement about the most important events and activities (33%); less agreement about good things initiated by clergy (29%); and no agreement about the good things initiated by laity. This seems to indicate that the clergy are even worse at understanding the importance of things done by the laity than vice versa!

Question 5 (Features of church life requiring change): In only three parishes was there any overlap between the changes sought by clergy and the changes sought by laity, and in none of these was the overlap greater than 50%.

Question 6 (Areas of influence of the incumbent): There was 47% agreement between clergy and churchwardens: 100% in three parishes, some agreement in seven parishes and no agreement in three parishes.
Question 8 (changes in parish and church): There was 53% agreement about changes taking place in the past five years, again 100% in three parishes, more than 50% agreement in seven parishes and no agreement in three parishes.

Three of the four areas in which clergy and lay views most coincided were about clerical activity: question 2, 3 and 6. The other was a matter-of-fact question about important changes. The area in which no clergyman produced any of the same answers as his churchwarden was about good things which had resulted from lay initiatives. What this might be saying about clergy/lay roles will be considered in the final section of this chapter.

In the next chapter of this research the well-being of the local congregation will be considered, and the contrasting "popularity" of institutional religion and private belief will be noted. Maybe the disparity between the views of the clergy and the laity in our 13 parishes is an indication of this divide. The clergy might well have views conditioned by "the institution" and the laity's perceptions might well be more strongly influenced by the privatised religion which we shall discuss in Chapter Nine.

6. Conclusions about the Role of the Clergy

Two questions were raised at the outset of this chapter. One was about the clergy's response to secularisation, the second was about the overall role of the clergy. We now return to these two questions.
(a) Clergy Priorities and Secularisation

When the effect of secularisation on the church was discussed, the pressure towards religion becoming a separate, specialised function in secularised society was noted. (31)

The religious leader might respond in two ways to the forces urging a more confined religious role upon him. He may accept this specialised role, or he may resist it and seek to develop a secular role. As we have seen, examination of the priorities held by the clergy provides strong evidence that they are resisting any coercion to adopt secular values, if such exists. (32) If their priorities are being influenced by secularisation, it is towards being more sacred orientated. They are accepting the role of the specialist whose priorities are largely sacred orientated. (33)

Carr writes of the pressure on clergy to work increasingly within the church community, with religious activities being ends in themselves rather than as ways by which people are equipped to address the needs of the secular world (Carr (1985) p.42). Certainly the clergy investigated, by both postal questionnaire and interview, in this study were clear about the priority of activity within the church community, namely prayer. The distinct activity, praying, of the specialist religious institution, the church, is what clergy regard as most important. This conclusion is significant in relationship to the overall model of the local church which we will examine in Chapter Ten. (34)

(b) The Role of the Clergy: the Clericalised Church

Our general thesis at this point is that local Church of England parishes
are heavily dominated by the clergy. This might not come as any surprise to some lay member of a church which happens to have an assertive vicar! Yet the Church of England is now a synodical church, and, in constitutional terms, power is shared between clergy and laity. (35) Clergy are often proud of increased lay participation in worship, pastoral ministry and leadership. Where this isn't the case, clergy will frequently bemoan how "they", some influential group of lay people, control the church and prevent the clergy implementing progressive changes. (36) In contrast to this, we look at what actually appears to be the case in the parishes investigated by this study. This is done by considering the priority given by the clergy to meeting their own "spiritual" needs; the significance of the length of incumbency; the influence of the whole group of clerical variables from the postal survey; and the range of impressions about the 13 parishes in which interviews were conducted.

(1) Clergy and their own needs

As has just been noted, the top priority of clergy is prayer. There is, however, more to it than this. Their top priority is their own private, daily devotional life. (37) Part of this may be clergy responding to expectation to be "the holy man" in his community, part may also be the clergy being preoccupied with their own needs. This is not necessarily to accuse the clergy of self-interest. Maybe the bishop urging his clergy to be faithful in their own devotional life; an understanding of a need for the church leader to be "right with God" before he can lead; the popular expectation of the vicar as being the "religious" person; the inheritance of a church leadership based on a paternal hierarchy and the conflicts and insecurities of clergy in a secularised society, all lead to an inevitable preoccupation by the religious leader with his own most sacred orientated
activity, saying his prayers.

(ii) Length of Incumbency

Earlier in this chapter we noted the way in which length of service seemed to be associated with emphases in church life. Length of incumbency is, however, associated with many more factors than sacred orientation. It is associated with:

- Higher levels of corporate sacred activity
- More sacred charities being supported
- Higher levels of total sacred orientation
- Larger church membership
- Larger church attendance
- Parishes not in a New Town
- Higher sacred priorities
- and, possibly, higher levels of secular orientated activity and more secular charities being supported.

Much of this can be reduced to longer staying incumbents being in busier parishes. There were some speculations about the reasons for this in Chapter Five. Does the thriving parish encourage the vicar to stay longer? Do clergy arriving in thriving parishes at a time when children's education or the stability of their own mature years make them inclined to settle for a while? Certainly the two longest staying incumbents in the 13 parish sample were the oldest men interviewed and were in the two most flourishing parishes: East Ecton and South Wiston.

The Ripon/Sheffield survey showed parishes with larger attendances as having
fewer changes of incumbent. (41) Hunke, in his detailed study of Baptist ministers in the United States of America, concludes that between 1968 and 1972 "clergymen serving low achievement churches pastored a significantly larger number of churches than did clergymen serving high achievement churches" (Hunke (1974) p.129). Perhaps what we have discovered in Church of England parishes is a more widespread phenomenon.

The conclusion drawn here is not about what causes what in terms of length of incumbency and flourishing parishes. Attention is drawn to a total impression that the personal circumstances of the clergy are associated with a wide range of features of church life in the parish. It is as though there is some complicated puzzle of interlocking pieces, of which the clergyman is the key piece: remove him and the puzzle collapses and the overall pattern disappears.

(III) **The Group of Clerical Factors**

When the viability of a number of possible basic models was explored, clerical variables from the results of the postal survey were grouped together. (42) This group of variables was found to be highly associated with secular and sacred orientation. The other category of factors considered in the same way was the contextual variables. This group was not highly associated with the basic orientation of church life.

This means that the range of activities within the life of the local church is related to the personal circumstances and predispositions of the clergy and not to the particular features of the church's context such as the population size of the parish. The clearest illustration of this is the way in which the priorities of New Town clergy seem to be quite unaffected by
the distinctive nature of New Town communities and the New Town church life.

The work done on testing models based on groups of variables did not involve statistical testing. It remains, however, another pointer towards the extent of the influence of the clergy.

(iv) The Results of the Interviews

The strongest indication of the influence of the clergy came from the interviews in the 13 parishes. The most striking of these results which relate to the role of the clergy has already been set down in Table 8:3.

The lack of any common view between clergy and laity in responding to questions about important events and especially the results of lay initiatives, and about things which ought to change was very marked. Furthermore, three of the four questions about which there was most agreement were questions about the clergy and not the parish. The general picture was of clergy and laity having quite different judgements about the life of the parish, and of aspects of the work of the clergy being those things which were sufficiently prominent in the life of the church for there to be a modest 50% agreement or thereabouts.

Some remarks and impressions from the interviews illustrated this. West Kirby churchwardens spoke of the parish's need of a leader. Despite the mutual respect and affection between clergy and churchwardens in Chalton, the wardens seemed not to have much idea what was happening in the life of the church. Bourne Keaton had a vicar going his own way regardless of lay opinion. The impressive incumbent of Osgarth was at least aware of the need to "make people less dependant" but this implied, of course, that they were
presently dependant on their vicar.

Even close knit fellowship of Langby did not lead to clergy and wardens seeing things the same way. There was only 35% coincidence of views, as shown in Table 8:3. In the interviews, the churchwardens spoke with pride of the important involvement of the vicar in a major voluntary organisation, a large Manpower Services Commission scheme and four local schools. The vicar, who was in no way taciturn, mentioned not one of these.

The Incumbent of Polton readily spoke of his own private study as being the most important part of his work. In Fieldsend the vicar was quite clear about his set-apart priestly function. Topley Parva and Upper Bagley both displayed breakdowns of communications between clergy and laity: in Topley Parva they gave the impression of talking about different parishes; in Upper Bagley the vicar was determinedly trying to preserve and strengthen the churchmanship of the parish, whilst the laity were preoccupied with the damage done to relationships by a previous incumbent.

Only East Ecton and Bridge Town left no impression of dissonance between clergy and laity. East Ecton because of their careful planning and Bridge Town because of the vicar's commitment to lay leadership. The latter makes the low score of Bridge Town in Table (8:3) (32%) all the more noteworthy.

Impressions from the interviews were that with a few notable exceptions clergy and laity felt very positively about each other, and yet they had very different views about what was, and ought to be, happening in the parishes. The vicar's leadership was not, therefore, one which expressed the views and priorities of the laity.
(v) **Conclusions on the Clericalised Church**

The composite picture obtained is of a strongly clericalised church. (44) It would be noteworthy if this picture just emerged from the data of the postal survey: although that could be explicable in terms of the clergy's influence in supplying the information. Yet, even here, it must be remembered that information such as that about theological colleges did not come from the clergy. The conclusions gain much more force, however, when it is seen that lay views, whilst reflecting different priorities about church life as a whole, supply the same overall picture of a clericalised church.

The picture referred to has been created by the following items:

1. Clergy priorities are closely related to the level of secular orientation of the parish.
2. The churchmanship of the clergyman's theological college is closely related to the level of sacred orientation of the parish.
3. That clergy's top priorities are about their own devotional lives.
4. The personal history of the clergyman is highly associated with the emphases in parish life.
5. The total group of clerical variables is highly associated with the orientation of church activities.
6. Those items of parish life about which clergy and laity have the greatest level of agreement are to do with the clergyman himself.
and, most noticeably,
7. There is an enormous disparity between lay and clerical
perceptions about the important features of the life of the church.

A number of factors clearly contribute to this:

(1) Some clergy actually want to control their parishes: the clergy of Bourne Keaton and Upper Bagley indicated this.

(2) Clergy are active full-time in leadership of the local church, and are thus very influential.

(3) Clergy are professional leaders, with professional skills through which they influence the parish. This was obvious in the case of the vicar of Osgarth, for example, whose professional competence had borne considerable fruits.

Carr suggests that clergy might develop a "consultancy model" in how they work (Carr (1985) p.14ff). Although he would decry clerical dominance, his model does draw attention to the professional skills of the clergy.

(4) The laity want to be dependant and have the vicar take responsibility for decisions. This was very evident in West Kirby and Osgarth. Bailey writes of the ambivalent dependant relationships between laity and clergy. The mode of address "Father" reveals the dependence of the lay "child" on the priestly "parent" (Bailey (1983) p.251).

(5) The paternalism of a former social order persists into the present, particularly in the religious institution which tends to be resistant to change.
(6) Clergy are at the focus of the pressures of secularisation which tend towards the church becoming a separated-out specialist religious institution. Martin draws attention to the way in which this emphasises the sacredness of the priest and thus leads to clericalisation (Martin (1978) p. 287).

Carr, as has been mentioned, writes of the pressures on the clergy to work increasingly within the church (Carr (1985) p. 42). This will, of course, mean that the clergyman will be concentrating more on "running the church" than if his role were less confined. Russell makes this point as he writes about the contracting range of functions of the clergy and how this means that "running the church" matters more (Russell (1980) pp. 274f and 299).

That the church is more clericalised than progressive clergy would wish is not just because not all clergy are progressive! A range of factors are at work, and maybe the result is inevitable for a church like the Church of England. (45)
Chapter 8 - Notes

1. See Chapter III, section 4(d). (page 68)

2. See Chapter II, section 4. (page 38)

3. See Chapter V, section 2(f)(i). (page 132)

4. Section C in questionnaire: see Appendix I section 1(d). (page AI-5)

5. The "sacred priority score" and the "secular priority score" are the inverse of each other: see Appendix I, section 3(a), (page AI-16) variables 15 and 16 for details of the computation of these scores.

6. The sample in Diagram 8:2 was 119, with a mean of 0.584, a median of 0.583 and a range of 0.167 to 1.0.

7. See Chapter V, section 2(f)(iv). (page 137)

8. Question 3 in the interview schedule: see Appendix II, section 1(c)(i). (page AII-4)

9. The following is extracted from Table 23 in Hill (1977) (p.46):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priorities of the Clergy</th>
<th>1st Priority from 8</th>
<th>2nd Priority from 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily Worship</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging community involvement</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for Sunday</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instigating community involvement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaison with other clergy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study of scripture</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaison with other professionals</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. See Chapter III, section 4(d). (page 68)

11. See Chapter V, section 2(d)(v) (page 118) and Appendix I, section 3(a), variable 17. (page AI-30)

12. Clergy priorities and parish activities in a sample of parishes from the Dioceses of Ripon and Sheffield (Tables 11 and 12, page 19 in Hill (1977):-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secular Activity Scores</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular Priority Scores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

chi-square = 0.0286   p = less than 0.9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sacred Activity Scores</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred Priority Scores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

chi-square = 0.0942   p = less than 0.8

13. See Chapter V, section 2(d) (page 115) and Table AI:51 in Appendix I, section 4(c). (page AI-36)

14. See Chapter V, Table 5:4 and Table 5:5. (page 114)

15. Chapter V, section 2(d)(iii). (page 115)

16. There was less consistency between clergy priorities and parish activities in New Towns than in other parishes. See Chapter VII, section 3. (page 184)
17. See Chapter V, section 2(f)(ii). (page 132) See also Table AI:42 in Appendix I, section 4(b), (page AI-33) which gives various chi-square values and correlation coefficients.

18. See Table 5:2 in Chapter V, section 2(f)(ii). (page 108)

19. See Chapter V, section 2(f)(ii)(4) (page 136) and Table AI:48 in Appendix I, section 4(b). (page AI-33)

20. See Chapter V, section 2(f)(ii)(3) and Table 5:21. (page 135)

21. See Table AI:50 in Appendix I, section 4(b). (page AI-36)

22. See Chapter V, section 2(f)(ii)(4) (page 136) and Table AI:48 in Appendix I, section 4(b). (page AI-35)

23. See Chapter VI, section 4. (page 163)

24. See Table 8:1. (page 206)

25. See the relationship between variables 2 and 15 and between variables 2 and 11 in Table AI:42 in Appendix I, section 4(b). (page AI-33)

26. See variables 2 and 11 in Table AI:42 in Appendix I, section 4(b). (page AI-33)

27. Note that more recently ordained clergy tend to have been in their parishes a shorter length of time, which is hardly surprising! See Table AI:42 in Appendix I, section 4(b). (page AI-33)

28. See section 3(a)(ii) above. (page 205)

29. See Table 8:2. (page 209)

30. See section 3(b)(ii) above. (page 207)

31. See Chapter III, section 4(d). (page 68)

32. See section 2 above. (page 202)

33. Note the marked contrast with the study carried out by Busia. He reported that clergy saw the need to express "active compassion and love of neighbour" as of greatest importance. (Busia (1966) p.96). Differences between this study and Busia's may reside in changes taking
place in the intervening 20 years.

34. See Chapter X, section 3(c). (page 324)

35. During this century there has been much discussion about the role of laity in the Church of England. The "Life and Liberty Movement" in which William Temple was prominent, "Modernism" and the Ecumenical movement have all contributed to increased responsibility being given to the laity of the church.

The Enabling Act of 1919 and then the Synodical Government Measure of 1969 established a representative form of government for the Church of England. At local level this gives the Parochial Church Council responsibility for the affairs of the local church, with limited specific rights within that preserved for the incumbent. This partnership between clergy and laity has replaced the previous ecclesiastical autocracy of the clergy which existed at local level.

During the 1960s, writers such as Bliss (1963) urged the laity to play their full role in "being the church" themselves, and not just "helping the vicar". In a formal statement about the nature of the Church of England, Reardon writes of the clerical role being replaced by "ministers and laity working together". (Reardon (1986) p.26). The appointment in many dioceses of officers charged with enabling laity to play their full part in the life of the church indicates the emphasis given by diocesan authorities to the role of the laity.

36. In one of the parishes in the 13 parish sample, the incumbent spoke of displacing one family from a position of undue influence in the church, as being a major task which had been accomplished over the past few
years. In another parish in the sample, the incumbent complained of the way in which a family tended to oppose any changes he wanted to make.

37. See section 2 above. (page 202)
38. See section 3(c) above. (page 210)
39. See Chapter V, section 2(f)(ii). (page 134)
40. See Chapter V, section 2(f)(ii). (page 136)
41. The following shows attendance and changes of Incumbent in the Ripon/Sheffield study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of parishes having:</th>
<th>Change of Incumbent</th>
<th>No change of Incumbent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90 or more</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>less than 90</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

chi-square = 3.1696  p = less than 0.1
- from Hill (1977) p.32

42. See Appendix I, sections 3(iv) to 3(vii), (pages AI-25 to 27) and Chapter V, section 2(f)(iii). (page 137)
43. See Chapter VII, section 3(b). (page 187)
44. Towler and Coxon's study verifies this (Towler and Coxon (1979)) as does work done by Russell: e.g. "the clergyman's role appears to be the hub around which so many of the problems which face the contemporary Church are located". (Russell (1980) p.5).
45. A whole other range of questions are raised in other denominational traditions in England, especially in the new, lay-led, independent
charismatic churches. Despite their reaction against clericalised bureaucratic churches (which is how they see the Church of England) many of these churches develop an authoritarian leadership model which allows even less room for participation in decision making by ordinary church members.
Chapter Nine

THE WELL BEING OF THE CONGREGATION

Diagram 9:1

Outline of Research Process

General Observations and Ripon/Sheffield Survey (I)

Preliminary screening (I)

Research (I)

Primary questions

Sample screening

Preliminary modelling (VI)

Interviews (VI)

Secondary questions

Postal survey

Research (IV)

Discussion of Theory

Secularisation (III)

Existing typologies and models (II)

(Roman numerals in brackets indicate chapter numbers)

FINAL MODEL (II)

Page 231
IX THE WELL BEING OF THE CONGREGATION

1. Church Strength

(a) Background Trends

This chapter is primarily concerned with evaluating the data from this study on congregation size, church membership size and changes in both of these. The background against which these findings must be seen is the substantial amount of data which indicates a steady decline in church affiliation in the Western world. This point of view is strongly supported by a number of studies carried out in different countries in the past few decades. (1) A series of surveys (described as censuses) claiming to give an overall picture of the state of Christianity in Britain have been undertaken by a group sponsored by the Bible Society and 'Marc Europe'. In one survey Reid writes of the Church of England and the Methodist Church as losing members at the rate of 1.2% and 2.1% per annum respectively. (Reid (1979) p.15) (2) There are other examples of surveys showing similar levels of decline in support of the major Christian denominations in the United Kingdom. (3)

Some writers draw attention to the particular situation in the Church of England. Edwards writes of the halving of the proportion of the population receiving Easter communion between 1900 and 1970. (Edwards (1978) p.218) Others predict the virtual disappearance of public worship in the Church of England by the end of the century. (4) Brierley claims that the Church of England, Church in Wales and Church of Scotland, taken together have declined in attendance by 4% and membership by 5% from 1975 to 1979. (Brierley (1985) p.7) Reid contrasts the Church of England with Baptist and Pentecostal Churches and claims an annual decline of membership in the Church of England of, between 1970 and 1975, 2.9%, and between 1975 and
Surveys such as these reinforce the impression given in public media that the Church, and the Church of England in particular, is suffering an inexorable decline in its numerical strength. The result is a stereotype view in the popular mind: "The Church of England is in decline". It is against this background that the findings of this study must be considered.

(b) Numerical Data from this Study

(i) The Active Nature of the Church Strength Variables

Before looking at figures for church attendance and membership we note one crucial feature of the church strength variables. As was mentioned in Chapter Six of this study, the two most active variables (that is, those variables which had the greater number of associations with other variables) were the variable 'church attendance' and the variable 'whether or not the parish is in a New Town'. The variables derived from the postal questionnaire were grouped into five categories: namely, variables associated with time; clerical variables; variables to do with the corporate life of the church; church strength variables; and variables to do with the context in which the parish was set. The variables in the church strength category were substantially more 'active' than those in any of the other categories. The number of associations per variable for church strength factors is 10.7 whereas for all other variables the average number of associations per variable is 3.2. This indicates that the numerical strength of the local church is related to identifiable features of the local church rather than being a matter of chance. Table 9:1 shows these associations and their direction.
Table 9:1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>18 Membership size</th>
<th>19 Attendance size</th>
<th>20 Membership increase</th>
<th>21 Attendance increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Years in Parish</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Demolition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 New building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Sacred charities</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Corporate secular activity</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Secular charities</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Total secular score</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Priority cluster</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Membership</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Membership increase</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Attendance increase</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 Percentage new housing</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Ecumenical activity</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 New Town or not</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Speed of questionnaire return</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Year of Ordination</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 Population</td>
<td></td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 Churchmanship</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Direction of association is shown by sign)

(ii) Attendance

In the postal questionnaire respondents were asked to estimate the number of people attending public worship at the parish church on an 'ordinary' Sunday in Spring for the years 1976 and 1980. The choice of phrase was deliberate so as to obtain an indication of how many people were in church when bad weather, peak holiday seasons and major festivals were not influencing them. This question followed the question about the number of
Diagram 9.2

Numbers of parishes with various Sunday attendances

Attendance on anordinary Sunday in Spring 1980

Number of parishes

Page 235
people receiving Holy Communion on Easter Day and at Christmas. This was to ensure that the incumbent was noting figures which were recorded in his Church Registers, Christmas and Easter Communicants, before actually estimating the attendance. The figures for normal Sunday attendance would be those which the incumbent would include in statistical returns to Church authorities and, therefore, not just estimated for the purpose of completing this questionnaire.

Diagram 9:2 shows the frequency distribution of different ranges of attendance. The mean attendance figure is 112.35. This figure, which is affected by the seven parishes in the sample which claimed an attendance in excess of 250, is much higher than that quoted as the national average attendance figure for Anglican churches by Brierley (Brierley (1983) p.22), which was 65 for the year 1979. It will be noticed, however, that the peak of the distribution does occur in the 60-70 range. Thus the mode of attendance figures would be similar to Brierley's 'average' of 65. Almost 40% of the parishes responding claimed an attendance in the range 51-100 and 68% claimed an attendance in the range 51-150.

(Ill) **Membership**

In the postal questionnaire, as well as the question about the number of people attending on an ordinary Sunday, questions were also asked about numbers on the Church Electoral Roll and Communicants at Easter and Christmas. (7) The mean of the responses to these three questions for the year 1980 was taken as being an indicator of the level of membership of the local church: containing as it did an element relating to the nominal membership from the Electoral Roll and the attendance level on the two major Christian festivals.
Diagram 9:3 shows the frequency distribution of the membership size of congregations in the parishes investigated. The figures upon which the membership figure is based are ones which are required in Church of England statistical returns and records of which are kept in local parishes.

Since the Church of England is an established church it is to be expected that the membership of the Church will be higher than the attendance on an ordinary Sunday. This proved to be the case: the mean membership figure was 155.09. The distribution follows very much the same general shape as that for the distribution of attendance. On Diagram 9:3 it can be seen that almost 19% of the parishes had a membership of between 90 and 110. 56% of parishes had a membership of between 110 and 250.

(iv) Changes in attendance and membership

Changes in attendance and membership between 1977 and 1988 were of particular interest. These are set down in Tables 9:2 and 9:3.

Table 9:2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers of Parishes showing various changes in Attendance and Membership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decrease of 50% or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9:2 and 9:3 show that a substantially higher proportion of churches claim an increased membership and attendance than claim a decreased membership and attendance. These figures are quite contrary to the general background picture of declining church strength. The attendance figures are the more dramatic: 66% of responding parishes claim an increase of 10% or more in their attendance. The combined membership figures show very much the same pattern.

Thus the major question is raised: Why is there such a contrast between indications of increasing church strength in this study, and the stereotyped popular view of declining church strength?

(c) Clarification of Evidence from this Study

(i) Church strength variables

The postal questionnaire for this study was designed to monitor how variables relating to attendance and membership might be affected by some obvious factors which were not otherwise of particular relevance to the study. Three such factors were identified: whether or not there had been a significant amount of demolition of property within the parish; whether or
not there had been a significant amount of new building in the parish (8); and whether or not there had been any scheme of pastoral re-organisation involving the parish, other than minor adjustments of boundaries. In the questionnaire, the period of time since the 1st January 1976 was specified as the relevant period of time of each of these.

The relationship between the resulting variables and the variables of church membership, attendance and changes in both are set out in Table 9:4.

Table 9:4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demolition, New building and Pastoral Re-organisation against Church Membership and attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 Church Membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Demolition - chi. sq.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- pbis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 New Building - chi. sq.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- pbis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Pastoral Reorganisation - chi. sq.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- pbis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(i) Chi. sq. indicates the chi-square value  
(ii) pbis indicates the point biserial correlation coefficient  
(iii) Solid underlining indicates association significant at the 5% level  
(iv) Broken underlining indicates trends less than significant at the 5% level

Table 9:4 shows that only three of the associations are significant.

The apparent association of demolition of housing with low attendance simply means that 10 out of 11 parishes in which there had been demolition were amongst those with lower church attendance. The very small number of
parishes reporting significant demolition, together with the rather low point biseral correlation co-efficient, indicate the impossibility of making any generalisations from this association. The association between higher increases in attendance and the new building having taken place since 1976 is due entirely to the 'New Town phenomenon'. As previously stated, there was no statistically significant evidence for non-New Town parishes with more new housing having higher attendance levels. Thus the association shown between variables 4 and 21 in Table 9:4 is accounted for entirely by the New Town parishes in the sample.

The slight trend towards parishes which have been the subject of pastoral re-organisation having greater increases in attendance than other parishes is again largely explained by the New Town parishes. In new towns there had been a much greater amount of pastoral re-organisation and the parishes were, as has already been noted, experiencing higher than average increases in attendance.

In brief, no conclusions could be drawn about the control variables 3, 4 and 5 having any major influence on church strength - beyond those influences which are accounted for primarily by the difference between New Town and other parishes. Thus it is not the influence of demolition, of new house building nor pastoral re-organisation which accounts for differences between the results in this survey and the popular impression of declining church strength.

(ii) Non-responding parishes

Table 9:2 shows that, of the 144 parishes to whom the questionnaire was sent, there was no information given concerning the membership change of 42
parishes and no information given concerning the attendance change of 46 parishes. In each case 20 of these parishes were parishes whose incumbents had simply not returned the questionnaire at all. It may have been possible that these non-responding parishes were parishes whose membership and attendance had declined. If this were the case then 40 or so parishes distributed over the first three columns of Table 9:2 could dramatically change the picture from this survey.

In the process of obtaining responses to the postal questionnaire a telephone reminder was used to persuade non-responding clergy to complete their questionnaires. The result of this was that, of the 144 questionnaires, 86 were returned prior to the telephone reminder, and 34 returned subsequently; with 24 not being returned at all. On the premise that those parishes which returned questionnaires only after a telephone reminder were more likely to show the characteristics of those parishes making no return at all, it was felt possible to gain some information about the characteristics of the non-returning parishes. Tables 9:5 and 9:6 show the results of this comparison.

Table 9:5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership changes in Parishes responding with and without reminders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Return made before reminder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of parishes with high increase in membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

chi sq. = 0.221
Table 9:6

Attendance changes in Parishes responding with and without reminders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Return made before reminder</th>
<th>Return made after reminder</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of parishes with high increase in attendance</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parishes</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

chi. sq. = 4.381
p = 0.036

Table 9:5 shows that the parishes returning their questionnaire subsequent to a reminder did not have significantly different increases in membership to those parishes returning the questionnaire prior to the reminder. Table 9:6 shows that those parishes requiring a reminder to return their questionnaire had more frequent increases in attendance than other parishes. Thus no evidence at all was found to support the notion that the non-responding parishes might have less frequent increases in attendance and membership than the responding parishes. (9)

(III) Previous research in the dioceses of Sheffield and Ripon

In the research which I carried out in the Dioceses of Ripon and Sheffield similar information had been sought regarding changes in attendance and membership in the one-third sample of parishes investigated within these two Dioceses. If anything, the picture obtained in that piece of research was even more dramatic than that from the current work. Of the 84 parishes which had responded to the questionnaire, 40 claimed an increase in attendance of more than 5% and 46 an increase in membership of more than 5%,
whilst only 12 and 11, respectively, claimed decreases of more than 5% in these two figures. (Hill (1977)). (10)

These figures, referring to changes having taken place from 1973 to 1976, show the same direction of change as do the changes in numbers on the Electoral Rolls of the two Dioceses (CIO (1977), CIO (1979)). These are set down in Table 9:7.

Table 9:7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers on Electoral Rolls in the Dioceses of Ripon and Sheffield</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ripon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheffield</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This evidence confirms the data from the present study.

(iv) Impressions of church strength from interviews

A further cross-check, of an impressionistic nature, was made of the church strength data. When the Interviews took place in the 13 selected parishes, no direct question was asked concerning church attendance or membership. I did, however, note my own impressions of the way in which the clergy and lay leaders perceived the strength of their own church life. These are set down in Table 9:8.
Table 9:8

Interviewers' impressions of congregational strength
of 13 parishes based on interviewees' responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>Impression of congregational strength</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Kirby</td>
<td>Strong and having increased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalton</td>
<td>Weak and static</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bourne Keaton</td>
<td>Moderate and declining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattrill</td>
<td>Moderate and increasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osgarth</td>
<td>Strong and having increased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langby</td>
<td>Strong and having increased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Wiston</td>
<td>Strong and having increased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Bagley</td>
<td>Weak and having decreased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Ecton</td>
<td>Very strong and having increased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polton</td>
<td>Weak and having decreased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topley Parva</td>
<td>Moderate and decreasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fieldsend</td>
<td>Moderate and having increased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge Town</td>
<td>Weak and static</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parishes with buoyant congregational strength: WK, CA, OS, LA, SW, EE, FI: total 7 (54%)

Parishes with static congregational numbers: CH, BT: total 2 (15%)

Parishes with decreasing congregations: BK, UB, PO, TP: total 4 (31%)

From Table 9:8 the general impression gained of the 13 parishes was similar to that gained from the postal questionnaires and set down in Table 9:3. This cross-checking suggests the returns on the questionnaire were reliable. Feelings of both clergy and laity about the strength of their church did
seem to be substantially influenced by comparisons with neighbouring parishes. In addition to this, the sense of 'well-being' or otherwise arising from the popularity of the Incumbent was also influential in subjective perceptions about how well things were going. These two factors could have a distorting effect on the attendance figures from the postal questionnaire.

Despite these distortions and despite inaccuracy of 'estimates' relating to attendance figures, it must still be said that the pattern of changes in membership, the pattern of changes in attendance and the impressions from the interviews are remarkably consistent. There was, in a high proportion of parishes (54% of those interviewed and 47% of those responding to the postal questionnaire) an impression that the local church is buoyant, with attendances increasing substantially.

(d) Conflict of Data with Perceived Trends

Attention must now be given to the discrepancy between the data arising from this study and the popular stereotyped view that fewer and fewer people are attending church these days. We shall look at four areas in this section. The first is the nature of what is being measured in surveys of church affiliation. The second is the possibility of biases arising from the researchers' own predispositions. The third is possible biases arising from the nature of the sample. Finally we shall note some other data which also contradicts the impression of all church attendance being in decline.

(i) Indices used for assessing strength of church affiliation

As has been said, the figures for attendance (on an ordinary Sunday in Spring) and membership (composite of Electoral Roll and Easter and Christmas
communicants) are chosen as meaningful indicators of church strength. Surveys quoted as showing a decline in strength are frequently using different indicators.

Many figures quoted, such as attendance at Holy Communion at major Christian festivals, are associated not only with the level of active membership of a Christian congregation, but also with patterns of religious observance within society at large. Thus it must be noted that between 1976 and 1980 the number of communicants on a normal Sunday within Church of England churches actually rose from 635,000 to 709,000 (with the Sunday communicant rate per thousand of the population, aged 15 and over, remaining fairly static: 18 for 1976 and 19 for 1980. (CIO (1982) p.74)).

There is evidence that participation in initiation rites of the Church of England has been declining for some time. The figures do, however, need to be examined carefully as the following extracts from Church of England publications show.

Table 9:9

| Baptisms, confirmations and attendance in the Church of England 1966 - 1977 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Infant Baptism | - | - | 381,447 | - | 237,000 | 230,000 |
| Confirmations | 140,134 | 135,476 | 125,294 | 116,631 | 94,000 | 96,000 |
| Persons usually attending Sunday worship | - | - | 1,605,670 | - | 1,247,000 | 1,267,000 |

(From C.I.O. 1971 pp 170 et.seq. & C.I.O. 1979 p.14)
The figures in Table 9:9 confirm that there was a decline in participation in rites of initiation in the 1960's, and there is little doubt of a continuing decline in Baptism. Both Confirmation and attendance figures do, however, show an increase from 1976 to 1977. Research carried out in the Dioceses of Ripon and Sheffield has shown that there are signs of church growth rather than decline. (Hill (1977) p.15) (10)

There are particular problems with any conclusions drawn from numbers on Church Electoral Rolls, which are notoriously inaccurate indicators of real membership levels within the Church of England. Thus I use a composite membership indicator, only one-third of which arises from Electoral Roll figures. Electoral Rolls are periodically revised, when a totally new Roll is written which requires fresh applications to be made before any name can be included on the Roll. In between these periodic revisions new names tend to be added to the Electoral Roll much more assiduously than old names are removed. This means that the Roll gradually increases in size until the major revision takes place. A full revision did take place in 1979, thus the figures in this research, for 1980, would not have been distorted in the way described above.

A further feature which may also have influenced apparent statistical trends is the use of stricter guidelines issued to parishes on how attendance figures should be computed, which could give the impression of attendances decreasing. The use of attendance and membership figures to calculate financial levies paid by parishes to their respective Dioceses may also have the effect of reducing the numbers returned!

The general claim made is that the indices used in this study are meaningful
ones and in many ways more helpful than those used in some other surveys.

(ii) Researchers' biases

One obvious difficulty in evaluating survey results is that of judging how much influence the researchers' own preconceptions have been allowed. Greeley speaks of there being a strong humanistic bias against the survey data, thus accusing sociologists of distorting the picture. (Greeley op.cit. p.13) On the other hand, Brierley et al (Brierley (1980), (1982) and (1983)) seem to be advocating the causes of Baptist Churches and Independent fellowships, with whom they see the future success of the Christian mission lying, and whose theology they presumably support. This might well be a contributory factor in the disparity between some survey results and the data produced by the present research.

Some writers warn against an over-concern with statistical data. (11) It is very difficult, however, to see how one can judge what is actually happening within society without some recourse to numerical data.

There are substantial warnings against drawing too many conclusions from any one piece of research. (12) (13) It is because of these considerations that attention is given here to putting the new data against the background of the wider picture.

(iii) Features of the sample

The present study does not contain any substantial number of rural parishes in the sample to which the postal questionnaire was sent. Investigation of the changes in membership and attendance in rural congregations is well beyond the scope of this study; but it is possible that the discrepancy
between the trends shown here and the background trends in religious affiliation is affected by this. In my previous research in the Dioceses of Sheffield and Ripon it was clear that patterns of church growth apparent in urban and suburban parishes were not apparent in rural parishes. (Hill (1977) p.17f)

It is obvious that no churches which were closed at the time of the sending out of the questionnaire were surveyed! Within the Deaneries to which the postal questionnaire was sent, there were likely to be some churches which were open at the date for which the first set of figures were requested, but closed by the time the questionnaire was sent out. Any decline in the overall figures resulting from such closures would not show up in the results. The effect of this is, however, unlikely to be large. Over the whole period 1977 to 1980 less than 300 Church of England churches in the 42 dioceses were made redundant out of almost 17,000 churches. If the rate for the sample of this study were twice the national average there would still have been fewer than five churches made redundant in the sample.

(iv) Supporting data

Whilst the popular view has been that church membership and attendance are in decline, some survey data has given a different picture. Greeley produces figures based on work by Gaffin on gallup studies and concludes that the major phenomenon is that of a continuity in religious belief. (Greeley (1973) p.11) A number of other studies produce strong evidence to support this conclusion. (14-17)

What is argued here is not that all data showing decreasing church strength is inaccurate or misleading, but that what is happening in this study's
sample does not fit the stereotype and that other evidence also draws the stereotype view into question. From this it must be concluded that the simple picture of decline is misleading.

2. The Persisting Phenomenon

We have encountered the ambiguity contained in comparison of the results of this research with the commonly held view of declining church attendance and membership. We now consider another feature of religious life in England which has been the subject of extensive research: namely, the remarkable persistence of religious belief and practice amongst people who do not attend church.

(a) Universal need for religion?

"... the basic human religious needs and the basic religious functions have not changed since the Ice Age; What changes have occurred make religious questions more critical rather than less critical in the contemporary world."

So writes Greeley as he introduces the theme of the "Persistence of Religion". (Greeley (1973) p.1). The sociological assumption made by Greeley stands firmly in the Weberian tradition. (18)

Greeley argues that there is no reason to think that enthusiastic religious commitment is any more unfashionable today "than it was among Neolithic man". (Greeley op.cit. p.5) Are changes in forms of religious practice, therefore, being mistaken for a decline in religious practice? Slater claims that when religion is only being considered in the light of the 'sacred past', then changes in religion and religious attitudes must inevitably be perceived as decay. (Slater (1979) p.8)
It can be argued that different social processes have different and contrary effects. Gill proposes an "alternating model of secularisation and de-secularisation" and the processes of secularisation and de-secularisation are both apparent within contemporary society. (Gill (1975) p.128) (19) (20)

How are these processes reflected in change in church strength in local Church of England parishes? Are the contrary indications of both decrease and increase in part reflections of the contrary nature of the two social processes?

(b) Privatisation

(i) Decline in secular associations

Factors which affect the vigour of the local church group affect both religious and non-religious groups alike. Martin argues that those pressures under which the church finds itself impinge upon other voluntary associations. (Martin (1980) p.104) He cites particular examples of Trades Union chapels, political parties and other Guilds and Associations, concluding that, compared with these, the church is a remarkably persistent institution. (21)

According to Swanson the only valid comparison to make to determine the state of religious behaviour in contemporary society is with other areas of activity, as opposed to more common comparisons with religious behaviour in other times. Thus he produces figures comparing the religious behaviour with political behaviour. These could be interpreted as demonstrating that religion is a more persistent phenomenon than is politics. (Swanson (1968) p.811 et:seq.) (22)

One phenomenon affecting both religious and secular groups is privatisation.
This contains two major elements: the first is the heightened individualism of contemporary society, with the individual being regarded as the primary unit rather than the tribe or the family. The second is that much leisure activity, and, increasingly work, activity, can be carried out from the confines of the home. Computerisation and advances in telecommunications now make it possible to an individual to be a very active member of the wider society without stepping outside of his or her front door. The effect of this on the strength of gathered voluntary associations, of whatever kind, is likely to be negative. A further feature is the influence of individuals belonging to very large, amorphous, and heterogeneous social groups, in contrast with smaller, more closely knit and homogeneous groups such as the village or extended family. Given a variety of real options for style of life and personal belief, decisions about these things become more of a personal affair for the individual than they were in previous times.

(ii) Privatisation of religion

When Troeltsch discusses the church-sect typology, he describes a third type of religious organisation: "religious individualism". (Troeltsch (1981) p.381) Religious individualism has no external organisation, a very independent attitude and contains widely differing views of the central truths of Christianity. Troeltsch sees this unorganised religious group as a result of the fragmentation of ecclesiastical organisation, the reluctance of many to subscribe to the "conventicle-like" narrowness of the sect and a contemporary search for freedom of thought and belief. In his analysis of modern religious culture, Stark argues that the decline of the influence of religion is a necessary outcome of the differentiation within Christianity. Catholicism, Conservative Protestantism and Radical Protestantism can only exist together in the same society if there is a toleration of different
opinions, but this toleration leads to *indifference and individualism*.

(Stark (1972) p.375f.) Winter reaches the same conclusion about this trend towards individualism in religious belief from his analysis of the influence of the residential community on religious behaviour. The private character of the concerns of the residential communities in which religious congregations assemble, leads to modern pietism. (Winter (1963) p.16) Revivalist campaigns, such as those led by Billy Graham, also contribute to the understanding of religion as a private matter by emphasising individual conversion. (op.cit. p.13)

In these and other ways, writers have sought to analyse what has become the increasingly apparent phenomenon of the privatisation of religion. Russell speaks of the decline of institutional religion and the upsurge of "extra-ecclesiastical and quasi-religious forms of spirituality" as being two parts of the same process. (Russell (1980) p.5) Whilst Russell emphasises the demise of the Christian church as a primary symbol binding society together and promoting the consistency of belief, Habgood, following Berger, emphasises the increase of "market choice" in the realm of religion. (Habgood (1983) p.50)

From the different analyses of the situation it appears that a whole host of factors are involved in the privatisation of religion. The process of secularisation is clearly important amongst these. (23) (24) As religion is shifted from the centre of public influence and its institutions become marginalised in society, then religion itself tends to become a private affair. The reduction of the family group to the nuclear family also has some effect. (25) Corporate religion is no longer as sustained by family traditions and networks and, again, becomes a private affair. This is a
part of the atrophy of community referred to by Russell (op.cit. p.277), whereby a number of areas of life, which were once characterised by public activity, become essentially private. This affects the church as much as any other group. Communal belonging is dissipated by urbanisation, the village with the parish church as its focus is replaced by the anonymous urban sprawl with religious symbols being brought in front of people in the privacy of their television viewing rather than through the corporate life of the village community. (26) Part of what has happened is a polarisation of two different strands of religious behaviour: private and public. (27) Public religion has not entirely disappeared, but it has clearly been massively eroded by the process of secularisation. Private religion has not, however, been affected in the same way.

(c) Persistence of belief

Russell contends that whilst church-going has declined dramatically in the post-war years, religious belief, in its privatised form, has been remarkably persistent. (op.cit. p.4) A number of polls and surveys appear to confirm this conclusion. (28)

An impressive survey of religious beliefs has been carried out, under the direction of Towler, investigating the attitudes of the population of Leeds. An extract of some of the results of this survey are set down in Table 9:10 below.
Table 9:10

Private Belief in Leeds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a religion?</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you believe in God?</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you pray?</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How often do you pray?
- 38% Once a day or more
- 15% Once or more a week
- 2% Less than once a week
- 26% Occasionally
- 19% At times of stress etc.

(Extracted from "Conventional and Common Religion in Leeds" - Krarup 1983)

Table 9:10 shows the same evidence for the persistence of belief in the Leeds survey as the other surveys.

Whatever has happened to the practice of church-going, the evidence for the population of England continuing to hold religious beliefs is strong. The survey of religious attitudes in Leeds also bridged something of the gap between surveys of individual belief and surveys of church affiliation and attendance. Table 9:11 below shows some of the results obtained.
In Table 9:11 attendance at worship is clearly much less prevalent than religious belief, although 26% of the population surveyed claimed to have attended an ordinary religious service during the last year. What is most striking is that 72% of those asked claimed that they thought that attending worship was actually important. It will be seen that this is about the same percentage who claimed to believe in God and to pray. (see Table 9:10) Thus the question arises as to whether or not, in the popular mind, there is much of a distinction between belief and church attendance. (29) An explanation which could have been given for the persistence of belief whilst church attendance is declining is that those who retained religious belief but did not attend church, actually believed something quite different from those who did attend church. The Leeds survey again throws this explanation into doubt. According to the results of the survey, 31% of those who claimed neither to attend church nor to have a religion, gave 'orthodox' answers to questions about belief, whilst only 26% gave no 'orthodox' answers. This compares with 65.3% of those who either belonged to or attend
church giving 'orthodox' answers and 1.6% of this group giving no 'orthodox' answers. (Towler (1984) p.11)

Institutional religion has a remarkably high public profile in secularised British society. Knott demonstrates the high profile of conventional religion in the media. (30) (31) Argyle reveals that a high proportion of the population regard it as important that Britain is a Christian country. (32) The survey in "Now" magazine shows that 46% of adults attributed many of the problems in Britain to a lack of religious belief. ("Now!" (1979) p.24) Studies such as these show that religion is important in the popular mind.

This all adds up to a persistence of belief, which is more than residual superstition; a remarkably high public profile by religion and religious institutions; and a continuing popular feeling that institutional religion is important. It would now be surprising if, in such a climate, some churches were not successful in attracting high memberships and attendances. We now look at what the data for this study revealed about these 'successful' churches.

(d) 'Successful' churches

(i) Secular and sacred orientations

The relationship between the church strength variables and levels of sacred and secular orientated activity are summarised in Table 9:12.
Table 9:12

| Sacred and Secular Orientations and Church Strength |
|---------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Activity Score                  | Increase in Attendance | Increase in Membership |
| Secular Orientated              | +                        | 0                        |
| Activity Score                  | +                        | 0                        |
| Sacred Orientated               | (+)                      | 0                        |
| Activity Score                  | 0                        | 0                        |

(+= a positive association of variables)

Table 9:12 shows that larger membership and attendance are associated with higher levels of secular orientated activities. There is also a trend, which does not reach the level of statistical significance, towards an association between high attendance and high levels of sacred orientated activity. Changes in attendance and membership seem little associated with sacred or secular activity levels. (33)

(ii) Growth of larger and smaller churches

The present research showed a negative association between high membership and high attendance and membership change: that is, churches with high membership and churches with high attendance are generally both growing less quickly than other churches. There was a similar negative association between membership and attendance changes, meaning that churches with high membership were growing, in attendance, less than were other churches. This means that larger churches were growing less quickly than were smaller churches. This is due, in part, to the way in which the data was handled and percentages used: for a church congregation consisting of 12 people and increase in membership of 2 is a much higher percentage increase than it would be for a congregation of 70 people!
The data must still, however, be contrasted with other data showing different trends. Nason-Clarke claimed that in 1979 there was a greater likelihood that churches with over 100 attenders would be growing than not growing. (Brierley (1983), p.14) The whole thrust of her argument is that larger churches, or all denominations, are tending to grow, whilst smaller churches tend not to grow.

A piece of very local research carried out amongst Methodist churches in one of the New Towns covered by this present research came to similar conclusions. Table 9:13 is derived from this work. (Nias (1986)) (34)

Table 9:13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Churches</th>
<th>Decreasing Membership</th>
<th>Static Membership</th>
<th>Increasing Membership</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Churches with membership 50 or more</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churches with membership less than 50</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 9:13 it should be noted that two of the three churches with membership less than 50 and an increasing membership are newly established ecumenical churches located clearly within New Town developments. This may give the key to understanding why it is that the results of this survey are different from those claimed by Nason-Clarke. This key is to do with the 'New Town' phenomenon.
(iii) The growth of New Town churches

We have been particularly concerned with whether or not different things were happening within the life of Church of England churches in English New Towns than churches in other situations. Before considering features relating to attendance and membership in New Town churches, we shall, however, briefly consider the possibility of an association between levels of ecumenical activity and changes in church strength. The postal questionnaire asked a number of questions about various ecumenical activities in which the local church might be engaged and the results were scored in such a way as to allocate an 'ecumenical score' to each responding parish. Table 9:14 below analyses changes in membership against the level of ecumenical activity within the parish. Table 9:15 compares changes in attendance with ecumenical activity in the same way.

Table 9:14
Membership Change against Ecumenical Activity (20/24)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Ecumenical Activity</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increase in Membership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

chi square = 6.994 (p = 0.008)
(Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient = 0.249)
(Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient = 0.451, p = less than 0.001)
Table 9:15

Attendance Change against Ecumenical Activity (21/24)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Ecumenical Activity</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

chi square = 4.174 (p = 0.041)
(Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient = 0.334)
(Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient = 0.431, p < 0.001)

Tables 9:14 and 9:15 demonstrate quite clearly that there is a significant association between levels of increase in membership and attendance and levels of ecumenical activity: namely, the greater the ecumenical activity, the more likely the church is to have higher levels of increase in attendance and membership. A higher level of ecumenical activity is, however, one of the features of church life in New Town parishes, as has been noted in Chapter Seven. (35) Tables 9:16 and 9:17 compare membership and attendance changes respectively between New Town and non-New Town parishes.

Table 9:16

Membership Change against whether in New Town (20/25)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In New Town</th>
<th>Not in New Town</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

chi square = 1.065 (p = 0.302)
Table 9:17

Attendance Change against whether in New Town (21/25)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increase in Attendance</th>
<th>In New Town</th>
<th>Not in New Town</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$\chi^2 = 6.272 \ (p = 0.0123)$

Table 9:16 shows that there is no statistically significant association between higher increases in membership and churches being in New Town parishes. Thus the association between increases in membership and levels of ecumenical activity noted from Table 9:14 cannot be attributed to the greater levels of ecumenical activity in New Town parishes. Hence there is something else about higher levels of ecumenical activity which is associated with higher increases in church membership.

Moving to consider Table 9:17 and the relationship between increases in attendance and whether or not a parish is in a New Town, the picture is slightly different. Attendance in New Town churches has grown more than in other churches. Could it be, therefore, that the high proportion of parishes for which their clergy are claiming increases in attendance and membership results simply from the fact that almost half of the parishes responding to the postal questionnaire were in fact from New Towns? Table 9:18 shows that this is not the case.
### Table 9:18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership Change</th>
<th>Decrease of 10% or more</th>
<th>No change more than 9%</th>
<th>Increase of 10% or more</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>45.6%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 59)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance Change</th>
<th>Decrease of 10% or more</th>
<th>No change more than 9%</th>
<th>Increase of 10% or more</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>58.6%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 58)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9:18 shows that the proportion of non-new Town parishes claiming increases in membership and attendance is high. It is not so great as that for the whole sample (see Table 9:3) but, particularly for the attendance change, a very high percentage of non-New Town parishes (58.6%) claim increases in attendance of more than 10%. Comparison between Tables 9:3 and 9:18 also confirms that there is little association between whether or not a parish is in a New Town and higher increases in membership. This was also shown in Table 9:16. In Table 9:18 the percentage of parishes claiming membership changes of more than 10% in non-New Town parishes is 45.8%, only slightly less than the equivalent figure when the New Town parishes are added to the sample being considered (47%). To summarise: New Town and non-New Town parishes show a large proportion of churches growing; ecumenical churches are growing more; and New Town churches are growing more in attendance but not membership.

(iv) **Features of strong and growing churches**

One of the thirteen parishes in which interviews were conducted with clergy and church-wardens, East Ecton, appeared almost the archetype of the non-New Town suburban parish. The area was an established, affluent residential...
area with a large amount of very pleasant housing, no industry and very little commercial activity, yet within easy reach of the busy Industrial and commercial centres of the West Midlands. It was very much the picture of the successful church which seems to be in the mind of a number of writers. Winter, for example, writes of the way in which religion flourishes within the residential sector of society. He claims that the domestic and residential community, counter-balances the tensions generated in other sectors of society and that the family based church, with its organisations and activities for different age groups, fits very comfortably into this suburban community. (Winter (1963) p.12ff) It appears to be a cosy world into which busy professionals and executives can retreat, and in which the church can contribute its own feeling of security and comfort. (36) Thorns produces a similar picture of suburbia and writes of the sense of belonging which the church can bring to individuals in the suburban community. (Thorns (1972)) Thorns very much follows the analysis of Herberg who argues that there has been an up-swing in religious affiliation because of the need of individuals in the suburban community to conform to the patterns of that community and demonstrate their belonging by joining the church. (Herberg (1969)) This must also be true of the New Town situation, where the need to join groups in order to feel you 'belong' is acute since so many other roots of belonging are cut away. (37) Thorns quotes a number of other writers and their work in substantiating his thesis about buoyancy of religious life in suburbia. (Thorns op. cit. p.127-131) (38) (39)

The picture appearing from this present work does not entirely coincide with that of the suburban church, although some features which are associated with higher attendance and membership may well be expected to be features of the suburban church. The Incumbent of the larger church tends to have been
there for a longer period of time and is someone who has been ordained for some little while. The population of the parish of the larger church tends to be higher and the church supports a larger number of secular and religious charities and promotes a larger number of secular orientated activities. There was, however, no significant association between measures of church strength and the incumbent describing the parish as being suburban. (40)

Clearly part of what was discovered from the postal survey was that larger churches 'do more things': thus the number of charities supported and the levels of corporate secular-orientated activity are positively associated with church strength. Yet there is no association between the level of sacred orientated activities and either church strength or increases in church strength. This means that neither larger nor growing churches have more services or more things such as prayer groups and bible study groups, neither does their incumbent engage in more sacred orientated activities.

The association between church growth and size has already been noted: the smaller church appearing to be growing more than the larger church. Higher levels of ecumenical activity are associated with growing churches and growing churches are more frequently located in New Towns.
3. **Summary**

The stereotype view that the Church of England is in decline just about everywhere is not justified from this research data: a high proportion of both respondents to postal questionnaire and interviewees saw their churches as growing.

Secularisation leads to a decline in influence of the institutional church. It leads to the privatisation of religion, as do other contemporary changes. Private religious belief is remarkably persistent; it could even be strengthened by secularisation as a decline of institutional religion requires that religious needs are met in the private spheres of life.

Whatever distinctions sociologists make, it is not clear that the distinction between institutional religion and privatised religion is so sharp in the popular mind. Thus the persistence of private religious belief is not an entirely separate issue from the state of institutional religion.

Conditions still exist for local Church of England churches to thrive, and many are thriving. These local churches are quite different from the rapidly growing independent charismatic churches. This is demonstrated by the association of large congregations with high levels of secular orientated activities rather than sacred orientated activities such as prayer meetings and Bible study groups.

Within these flourishing local Church of England churches, members will readily talk about the decline in the state of religion. They will also have a tendency to regard what is happening to their own church as not being entirely determined by this general decline. "We have a good vicar", or
"There's a good crowd of hard workers here" will be offered as the determining factor. The local church does often see itself as 'over-against' a generally secular environment, and also as 'over-against' the prevailing religious environment as typified by neighbouring churches.

Growing churches are, in this survey, smaller churches and ecumenical churches. New Town churches are also growing, but only in attendance and not membership. Most consistent with the results of this research is that it is the finding of community within the church, not finding of religious meaning, which is most associated with growth in numbers. This is the phenomenon usually associated with the suburban church, but actually found widely outside suburbia.
Notes Chapter 9

1. Acquaviva quotes statistics from the United States of America, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Italy (Acquaviva (1979) pp.53-83) all of which he interprets as pointing to a remorseless decrease in the influence of religion. He writes (op.cit. p.37) "At a certain point the influence of social life began to be negative for religion so that: (i) almost all new social phenomena can to have a disintegrative effect on religious life; (ii) a steady diminution of the influence of religion on secular life became evident". He goes on to conclude that "Everywhere and in all departments, the dynamic of religious life reveals a weakening of ecclesiastical religiosity and, within certain limits, of every type of religious belief, including belief in God." (op.cit. p.83) This is supported by a mass of data, primarily based on the Roman Catholic Church. (op.cit. pp.60-80)

Some of this data indicating this apparent decline in religious affiliation has found its way into the press. In the "Observer" newspaper Searjant wrote of 800 churches being made redundant in the 1970's, of a halving of the numbers of Anglican clergy since Edwardian times and of there being almost twice as many full-time social workers as clergy in England (Searjant (1980)): an interesting illustration of the process of secularisation. "Aftenposten", a Norwegian newspaper, published the results of a two-part inquiry into the religious attitudes of Norwegians. In 1979 they reported the results of the Norwegian Gallup Institute enquiry ("Aftenposten" 4.1.79), which claimed that between 1965 and 1978 the number of persons affirming their belief in God had declined from 85% to 75%, and the proportion of
population attending worship from 28% to 24%. In a sequel to this survey, the Institute conducted a further poll which was also reported by "Aftenposten" showing that only 5% of the 1,743 respondents claimed to have attended church at least 20 times in the past 12 months, and a mere 3% of respondents under the age of 30 had attended church more than 20 times in the year. ("Aftenposten" 11.4.79)

Such surveys as these illustrate Acquaviva's (op.cit) thesis about the decline of religious practice and Cox's argument that the "age of the secular city" is an epoch whose ethos is quickly spreading to every corner of the globe bringing the complete disappearance of religion. (Cox (1965) p.3)

During the 1960's part of the Western Church became so convinced of the inevitable decline of religion that a radical school of theology developed giving expression to the ultimate logical consequences of the statistical trends. This was the theological movement known as "Death of God" school. Two of the foremost exponents of this position summed up their case: "we must realise that the death of God is an historical event, that God has died in our cosmos, in our history, in our "Existnz". (Altizer and Hamilton (1968) p.26)

2. Reid also claims that the United Reformed Church will be reduced to half its 1979 size by 1999, and that the Roman Catholic Church attendance would be reduced by one-third in fifty years. In the survey subsequent to this Pointer notes that 91% of English adults do not attend church. (in Brierley (1979) p.11) In the 1983 survey published by this group Barker claims that a decline averaging just over 1% per annum has continued since 1970. (in Brierley (1983) p.5) In this survey the percentage of the adult population of the United Kingdom belonging to a Christian church is said to decline from 22.2% in 1970
to 16.4% in 1985. (Brierley (1983) p.14)

3. For some particular Christian denominations in England the consequences of the trends in membership look worrying: as for the United Reformed Church and the Roman Catholic Church as indicated by Reid (above). The Methodist Church in England has been particularly concerned about its declining members. One official publication (Harris (1982)) shows that whereas 616 Methodist Circuits had a decrease in membership between 1975 and 1980, only 82 circuits had an increase in membership during the same period.

4. In 1971 Stacey claimed that the statement that the Church was in a state of decline was a complete under-statement, the Church, he wrote, is in "a state of near collapse". (Stacey (1971) p.302) Ede predicted that by the year A.D. 2000 "what we understand as worship will surely have disappeared". (Ede (1973) p.48)

5. Official Church of England statistics bear out some of this impression. Between 1960 and 1977 the number of those receiving Holy Communion in a Church of England church on Easter Day declined from 70 to 46 per 1,000 of the population aged 15 and over. The equivalent figure for those receiving Holy Communion at Christmas declined from 62 to 51 in the same period. (C.I.O. (1979) p.16)

Between 1958 and 1977 the number of persons per 1,000 of the home population Confirmed within the Church of England fell from 228 to 189, with the number per 1,000 of those Baptised according to the Rites of the Church of England during the same period declining from 633 to 579 per 1,000.

6. See Table 6:2.

7. See Appendix I, section 1(d), question F. (page AI-11)

8. "significant" was defined as "such as might noticeably affect church
membership or church attendance''.

9. Reference to Table 5:2 in Chapter V (page 108) will show that the only other characteristics of the slow respondents were higher levels of corporate sacred orientated activities, higher total sacred scores and higher attendances. All of these could simply indicate busier parishes. Theological college, year of ordination, parish population, churchmanship and extreme of churchmanship of college were all known for those who did not return the questionnaire, even after a reminder. For none of these factors was there any statistical evidence of non-responding clergy or parishes being different from the rest of the sample.

10. | Changes in No. attending on a Sunday | Changes in Nominal Membership |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greater than 20% increase</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 20% increase</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No change greater than 5%</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 20% decrease</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater than 20% decrease</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No information</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. See, for example, Beeson (1973) p.49.

12. A strong critic of much survey material is Gill, who is sceptical of the value of a number of surveys which have been carried out, drawing attention to the reliance of these surveys on church statistics. (Gill (1975) p.90)
13. Niebuhr writes:—

"... every party claim and every national judgement, every radial and religious prejudice and every private estimate of the interests and virtues of other men is something more and something less than a purely intellectual judgement. From the simplest judgement of our rival and competitor, to the most ultimate judgement about the character of human history and the manor of its final fulfilment, we are tempted to error." (Niebuhr (1946) p.19)

14. See note 8 above and also extracts below taken from Church of England statistics (C.I.O. (1977)).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ripon</th>
<th>Sheffield</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nos. of confirmations</td>
<td>(1971)</td>
<td>(1975)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1,891</td>
<td>1,837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33,698</td>
<td>34,837</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These figures do show a decrease in Confirmations, but an increase in numbers of names on Electoral Rolls. Taking numbers per 1,000 of population of Electoral Roll membership the figures are:—

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1972</th>
<th>1974</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ripon</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>43.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheffield</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. In 1977 a study of the state of church life in Britain was carried out by Perman, one of whose conclusions was that "the churches in Britain
are clearly not about to fade away". (Perman (1977) p.216) he quoted Martin (1967) who writes: "the figures for occasional church-going have been remarkably stable". In 1966, David Martin estimated that 15% of the population would be in church at least once on a typical Sunday, 25% would be there once a month, and 45% at least once a year." (Perman op.cit. p.34) Perman then quotes from an opinion research centre poll conducted for BBC's television programme "Anno Domini" giving equivalent attendance figures for the mid-seventies as 14%, 21% and 47% - a remarkable consistency with Martin's 1966 figures.

16. Of all English Methodist Churches, between 1980 and 1983, one-third are growing, either by: 10% or more in main congregation; or 10% or more in total membership; or 14% or more in number of new members. (from analysis of 1983 triennial membership returns of the Methodist Home Mission Division - unpublished, 1984)

17. Despite the overwhelming impression from the media of the decline in religious affiliation, the media themselves have noted some of the contrary data. One newspaper report spoke powerfully of the one-and-a-quarter million Anglicans attending church in England on an average Sunday. A figure that was edging up in the early 1980's. ("Observer" 1980)

18. See, for example, Parsons In Weber (1964 edn.) p.xxvii.

19. A study carried out by Gaffin on Gallup data of 1952 and 1965 is quoted by Greeley (Greeley (1973) p.11) and examines continuities and changes in religious beliefs and behaviour:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items of belief &amp; behaviour</th>
<th>% the responses in 1965</th>
<th>% changes from 1952</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Protestants</td>
<td>Catholics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believing in God</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believing Christ is God</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believing in the Trinity</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believing in Prayer</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praying 3 times a day</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believing in life after death</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believing in Heaven</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active church membership</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believing religion is important in own life</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending Church weekly</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending Church at all</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believing Bible inspired</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Bible weekly</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No. of cases | 3088 | 1162 | 128

20. In studies carried out on the American Presidential elections of 1976 and 1984, Wimberley uncovered an interesting example of the de-secularisation process described by Gill. This involved a remarkable proportion of the American electorate apparently justifying their voting patterns and political judgements by religious references. In an unpublished paper presented to the Eighth Implicit Religion Consultation at Denton Hall, Ilkley in 1985, Wimberley produced data to support his hypothesis that the American nation is subject to "transcendent justification": i.e. God justifies the American nation. Items identified as indicators of this and used in the research work were as follows:-

(a) the flag of the USA is a sacred symbol.
(b) God can be known through the historical experiences of the American
people.
(c) we should respect the President's authority since it comes from God.
(d) In this country (USA) people have equal, divinely given, rights to life, freedom and search for happiness.
(e) In America, freedom comes from God through the system of government by the people.

Wimberley goes on to claim that civil religion, as he called the combined single index derived from the above items, was a more effective social indicator about such things as how the government should dispose of Income Tax revenue than were all other indicators which were used, with the exception of occupational status.

21. Lukacs, an avowed atheistic Marxist, suggested that religious institutions were as persistent as the nation state! (Lukacs (1970) p.31)

22. From Swanson (1968) p.811 et.seq:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Politics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>68% of adults attend worship in 4 week period.</td>
<td>60% of electorate vote in national elections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76% of population believe Church is doing well.</td>
<td>80% of population believe government is doing well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40% of population give money to Church.</td>
<td>5% of population give to political party funds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7% of population indifferent to religion.</td>
<td>7%+ of population have no strong political opinion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

23. See Cox (1965 p.2f) where Cox argues that the decline of religion is inevitable with the process of secularisation having the effect of making religion, more 'privatised': by which he means that it ceases to be a unifying factor in society and becomes a matter of individual
judgement, whim or conscience.

24. An interesting illustration of the process of secularisation and its effects on religious life is quoted by Bailey (1983 p.15d). Bailey following a paper by M N Scrinivas claims that modernisation in India has been accompanied by the Sanskritisation of home life. This means that the secularisation of public life is being accompanied by an increase in the number of 'sacreds' in a private life, such as the elevation of mundane holidays to a level of religious significance.


26. It is important to note that the role of the church in the village community of the late 18th and earlier 19th centuries can be distorted by an idealistic and unrealistic view of the past. Williams produces a rather interesting description of the role of the church in the village of Gosforth. (Williams W M (1969) p.178-185) Here it is clear that the significance of the church is not so much in the level of attendance at public worship, which seems to have remained consistently low for eighty or more years, but in the way that the church affirms festivals. During the periods from 1839 to 1940 there seemed to have been a distinct difference between church attendance at religious festivals that were also secular festivals (Easter, Christmas, Harvest, Whitsun, All Saints and the Circumcision) which was very high, and attendance at religious festivals which were not also secular festivals (Ascension, Advent, Michaelmas etc.) which were very low (op.cit. p.190).

27. This is a case urged by Williams J A (1985) (p.16). Part of Williams' argument is that there is an area between public and private religion, routine daily life with its governing social processes and structures, which has been largely emptied of any explicit religious reference.

28. In a poll conducted on behalf of the Independent Television Authority
the conclusion was reached that 58% of the population of Great Britain described themselves as being "very" or "fairly" religious and only 6% admitted to being certain that there was no God. (Argyle (1970)) A poll conducted in Germany produced the conclusion that 68% of the population believed in God and 86% prayed. ("Der Spiegel" 1967)

Martin's claims for the population of England were similar: namely, that 85%-90% of the English said they believed in God. (Martin (1969) p.123) The results claimed by a survey sponsored by the magazine "Now!" were similar, although a touch more modest. The results of this poll were that 73% of all adults said that they believed in God and 53% of all adults believed in some kind of life after death. ("Now!" (1979) p.23) An exhaustive poll on religious opinions in England and Wales also confirmed this picture in 1986 (Religion Poll (1986)): 97% of the sample were brought up as Christians (op.cit. p.1), of those 79% believed in God (op.cit. p.2) and 47% thought religion is necessary for a happy life (op.cit. p.13).

29. The European Values Systems Study Group put the percentage of those between the ages of 18 and 24 in the United Kingdom who do not belong to any religion at a mere 14%. (Kerkhoes (1987))


31. "Common religion" refers to "religious beliefs and practices of an unorganised nature, superstitions, things that go bump in the night, fate, luck, the paranormal, astrology and spiritualistic". (Knott (1983) p.1f)


33. The association between low increases in membership and a higher level of support for sacred charities (see Table 9:1) is a fascinating
exception. It might be explained in two ways: the first possibility is that churches which are preoccupied by supporting church charities are less successful in attracting new members. Alternatively, it may be that larger churches, which do seem to support larger numbers of sacred charities, are growing less rapidly than smaller churches, which do not support as many sacred charities.

34. Nias has also conducted research at national level into the growth of Methodist Churches. This shows that churches with a membership from 0 to 24 were less likely to be growing in attendance than were larger churches. In complete contrast to Nason-Clarke's results, however, there was no difference in growth between any of the sizes of churches with a membership over 24. (Unpublished research into Home Mission Division of Methodist Church figures by Peter Nias (1987))

35. See Chapter VII, section 2. (page 182)

36. This is consistent with Reed's model of the function of the church and his "oscillation process". (Reed (1979)) He highlights the need of those upon whom others are dependent at work, to themselves become dependent in their religious lives.

37. In the New Town, however, the transient nature of the population means that larger congregations have not built up.


39. A study, somewhat isolated in sociological literature, by Gans (1967) draws different conclusions: namely, that in the lower middle class suburb of Levittown, purely social reasons for church attendance were rare.

40. See Table 9:1.