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More a Part than Apart
the Catholic Community in New Zealand Society
1918-1940

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Abstract

The Catholic community in New Zealand between 1918 and 1940 maintained a distinct identity while being fully integrated into the wider society, as this investigation of the demography, spirituality, organization, ethics and politics of Catholics demonstrates.

While Catholics, one seventh of the total population, were somewhat over-represented among lower socio-economic groups, they were distributed quite evenly throughout the country and retained little of the ethnic identity of the original Catholic immigrants.

Religious practices among Catholics followed overseas models, especially in the development of devotional piety and active spirituality, in emphasizing the Eucharist and the liturgy, and in basing lay spirituality on the religious life. Catholic spirituality and its underlying doctrines contrasted sharply with contemporary Protestant beliefs and practices, but while Catholics refused to worship with Protestants, Catholic spirituality was more commonly ignored or respected than criticized by them.

In establishing organizations and institutions for charitable, educational, social, cultural and sporting purposes, the Church did not seek to isolate its members from the rest of society but to ensure that they could participate in society without compromising their religious integrity. Catholic associations co-operated with their non-Catholic counterparts and Catholic schools taught the national syllabus while adding religious teaching and observances. The degree of social interaction between Catholics and Protestants is demonstrated by the prevalence of mixed marriages.

Catholic views on gender roles, apart from the exaltation of religious celibacy, were similar to those endorsed by the rest of society. The main Protestant churches reassessed their attitudes to ethical issues like birth control and divorce, but retained much in common with the Catholic Church. Despite clerical triumphalism, Catholics, too, restricted the size of their families and were no more opposed to divorce than Protestants were. Relatively liberal Catholic attitudes towards Sunday observance, drinking and gambling were more in keeping with those of responsible secular opinion - and practice - than with the views expressed by Protestant clergy.

Intense sectarian strife during and immediately after the First World War was not typical of the period and by the Second World War the Catholic Church enjoyed warm relations with the Government and the main Protestant denominations. Catholics were somewhat divided over Prohibition, but, as in the country at large, most opposed it. The Church was not committed to any political party although Catholic social teaching and the socio-economic status of numerous Catholics led to strong Catholic support for the Labour Party. In this, Catholics shared in a new political consensus during the 1930s.

No government could openly give financial assistance to Catholic schools - and some recent concessions were lost during the early 1920s - but indirect aid, especially under the Labour administration, reflected increased acceptance of the Catholic education system. Lack of support by politicians or the public at large for state-endorsed Bible reading in public schools, as demanded by the Bible in Schools League, demonstrated the weakness of the League's assumption that New Zealand was a Protestant country and vindicated Catholic opposition to the League.

Preface

This thesis investigates the relationship between the Catholic community and the rest of New Zealand society from the end of World War One to the beginning of World War Two. It argues that while retaining, and indeed cultivating, a distinct religious identity, Catholics sought to participate fully in the social and political life of the country. This interpretation is advanced by examining five dimensions of Catholic life: demography, spirituality, organization, ethical beliefs and practices, and politics. The Catholic Maori population is not considered here since it was quite separate from the rest of the Catholic community and writing its history would require a different set of sources and skills. Nor is it possible in a thesis concerned with the Church throughout New Zealand to give much attention to regional variations.

Chapter one is concerned with the Catholic population and considers its ethnic composition, geographical distribution, demographic features, employment patterns and rates of imprisonment. In chapter two, lay Catholic spirituality, especially devotional piety and active spirituality, the Eucharist and the liturgy, and the modelling of lay religious practice on the religious life are discussed before assessing their significance for the relationship between Catholics and the wider society. The aims and activities of Catholic organizations and institutions are reviewed in chapter three, which treats Catholic schooling and mixed marriage as case studies of Catholic integration. Catholic attitudes to issues of gender and personal ethics - as well as statistical evidence for contraception and divorce - are studied in chapter four. Chapter five focuses on sectarian controversy, the Prohibition issue, political parties and ideologies, and the growing rapprochement between the major churches. The politics of religious education are discussed in chapters six and seven, which are concerned with the quest for state aid for private schools and with the Catholic response to the Bible in Schools movement.

This thesis seeks to balance the concerns of history and religious studies. While students of religion are commonly tempted to divorce religious beliefs and practices from their historical context, historians all too often overlook religion - or pass ill-informed judgments on its significance. Religion is a cultural phenomenon, or group of phenomena, and can only be understood properly within its changing cultural contexts. Investigating religious beliefs and practices should form an essential part of the agenda of social historians - and not only because religion has a direct bearing on

other issues, such as the birth rate or the use of leisure. While religious history needs to be integrated into social and political history, for none of these exists in isolation, it also warrants investigation in its own right because, in varying degrees, it has been an important dimension of ordinary life. There has been very little academic writing on the Catholic community in New Zealand during the twentieth century. Parish and diocesan histories, while often of a very high standard, are usually preoccupied with the clergy and neglect the laity. Bishops and priests naturally feature on the pages of this thesis more than do any lay men or women - that is a reflection of both the organization of the Church and of the primary sources - but this thesis is not an institutional history. It endeavours, rather, to combine religious, social and political history.

The principal primary sources used in this thesis are the Catholic newspapers, especially the *New Zealand Tablet* (published in Dunedin), the *Month*, and the *Zealandia*, its successor from 1934 (both of which were published in Auckland). For the 1930s, two other Catholic journals have been used: the *Marist Messenger*, published by the Society of Mary, and *Catholic News*, published by St Joseph's parish in Wellington. Secular newspapers and official government publications, especially the census reports, *Parliamentary Debates* and the *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives* have also proved very useful. Some unpublished material in the National Archives and the Alexander Turnbull Library has been used. Catholic archival sources have also been important for this study, although most of the Catholic diocesan archives are either incomplete, unorganized or inaccessible. It is particularly disappointing that the best organized and most complete Catholic archive, that of the Auckland diocese, in which all the papers of Bishop Cleary (who died in 1929) were catalogued and made available to researchers by Father E.R. Simmons, has been effectively closed for most of the time during which this thesis was being researched. Full access was granted to the Marist archive and the Christchurch diocesan archive but elsewhere a lack of interest in promoting historical research and the fear that something embarrassing might be uncovered led to severe restrictions, although some very useful material was made available.

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Abbreviations

<i>ACD</i>	<i>Australasian Catholic Directory</i>
AGS	Anglican General Synod, Proceedings
ACDA	Auckland Catholic Diocesan Archive
<i>AJHR</i>	<i>Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives</i>
ATL	Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington
CCDA	Christchurch Catholic Diocesan Archive
<i>CE</i>	<i>Catholic Encyclopedia</i>
<i>CIC</i>	<i>Corpus Iuris Canonici</i> (Code of Canon Law)
CSSR	Congregation of the Most Sacred Redeemer (Redemptorist)
DCDA	Dunedin Catholic Diocesan Archive
HACBS	Hibernian Australasian Catholic Benefit Society
<i>JLC</i>	<i>Journals of the Legislative Council of the Dominion of New Zealand</i>
MAW	Marist Archive, Wellington
MAC	Methodist Annual Conference, Minutes
MYB	Marist Year Book
<i>NCE</i>	<i>New Catholic Encyclopedia</i>
NZEI	New Zealand Educational Institute
<i>NZPD</i>	<i>New Zealand Parliamentary Debates</i>
PGA	Presbyterian General Assembly, Proceedings
PPA	Protestant Political Association
SM	Society of Mary (Marist Fathers)
WCAA	Wellington Catholic Archdiocesan Archive