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Report No. 12

WHO IS A TRUE CATHOLIC?
SOCIAL BOUNDARIES ON THE
CHURCH
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Introduction: Theological and Social Boundaries

This report addresses a sensitive question: who is a true Catholic? The primary answer to such a question is theological; it has to do with what people believe and how they respond to the faith. The answer is also ecclesiological: when and by whom was and is the faith defined? But still other answers — social answers — are important in understanding parish life. These have to do with social boundaries, whether some people are to be treated in the same manner as other people. Such answers affect both the sacramental status of parishioners and whether they are shunned, formally or informally, by others in the parish.

Some Catholics interpret the social boundaries on the church as very expansive: basically, anyone who wants to hear the Gospel and receive the Sacraments is welcome. Most Catholics welcome such people but encourage growth in the faith through rites of entry and renewal. Still other Catholics apply quite restrictive definitions: only people who live in certain ways can remain within the fold. Still others set one criterion above all else:

subscription to the full magisterial authority of each pope and bishop. Some would argue that the restrictive Catholics are judgmental and exclusionary, while others would contend that the expansive Catholics are lax and permissive.

Such conflicts are endemic in Christian bodies. The love of God mediated through the People of God forgives seventy times seven. But the love of God may at times require probationary statuses, friendly persuasion, admonition, and the apparent drawing of lines to call attention to how one's behavior or beliefs distance that person from the faith and the community.

The views and feelings of Catholic parishioners about who is within the fold are often communicated in unconscious ways. The "outsider" in a restrictive community may feel perpetually unwelcome, or the "insider" in an inclusive community may draw the conclusion that the church is very tolerant of human foibles. Because judgments about social boundaries on the church may have consequences on parish life and mission, this report explores the question of who is a true Catholic in four ways: (1) it compares the judgments of parishioners across several "church," political, and civil behaviors; (2) it connects the kinds of social judgments parishioners make to their personal and social characteristics, and to their religious perceptions and practices; (3) it compares parishioners' judgments with the judgments of their parish leaders (volunteers, staff, and pastors); and (4) it examines the definition of social boundaries by parishioners as a function of characteristics of their parishes.

Formal Organizations, Social Boundaries, and the Christian Faith

All human organizations, from friendship cliques to professional associations, devise ways to assess who is within the group and who is outside it. These definitions of organizational boundaries may be very rigid as in the case of a religious cult, or very relaxed as in the case of election-contesting political parties like the Democrats or Republicans.

Typically people who aspire to leadership roles are judged by stricter organizational standards than are the rank-and-file. In formal organizations, potential leaders go through training and indoctrination regimens that set them apart from ordinary members and merit their being called "professionals." What they "profess," however, deals with the central character and purposes of the organization. That means that one of their essential tasks is to maintain definitions of organizational membership, to teach values to new recruits, and to encourage members to adhere to basic organizational values.

At the same time, it must be recognized that leaders also have personal aspirations. Promotion up the ranks often follows conformity to the will of current top leaders. Thus, which principles are professed, which norms are enforced, and which boundaries are

maintained may depend, in part, on the mid-level leader's organizational ambitions. Power motives are found in all human organizations.

Organizations also exist within larger societies. Some organizational values conflict with the outside culture. Oftentimes, however, there is a substantial exchange of values between the organization and the larger society. The organization tries to transform the society. At the same time, the society's values permeate the organization and sometimes modify what was earlier defined as a central belief or behavior.

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the early history of Christianity. Paul, as outsider to the apostolic band of Jesus' followers, carried the message and the way to Gentiles. He later wrote that he had become all things to all people for the sake of the Gospel. But the apostolic church at Jerusalem, under the direction of the head of the elders, James, and the apostle Peter, summoned Paul to account for his preaching. His converts, some leaders of the church at Jerusalem charged, did not practice circumcision or keep the laws of Moses. Paul argued that the church at Jerusalem had misunderstood the Gospel and set inappropriate restrictions on membership in the church. He contended that Jesus, last of all, had appeared to him too, and that he had legitimate claim to apostolic leadership. After wrestling with the problem, Peter and James came to Paul's view about some of the Jewish laws and corrected the definitions of the "Judaizers." The church, which was first expanded at Pentecost and then contracted at Jerusalem, eventually reached all corners of the Roman world, both adapting and shaping a wide variety of cultures. Paul's epistles spelled out appropriate religious and social practices for these new churches. Many would argue that the kerygma, the core, what is true, remained, but that the boundaries of other beliefs and practices became more permeable.

Disputes over boundaries are never easy in religious organizations, particularly in periods of massive missionary expansion or periods of great cultural change. Boundary definitions are more tidy in sectarian churches, i.e., those churches that define membership through adherence to one central set of beliefs and behaviors. In universal or catholic churches, boundary definitions often are quite general, and specific judgments reflect a complex mix of cultural tradition, systematic study, and power conflicts within large bureaucracies.

Sociologists of religion examine such processes through Max Weber's classic essay on "the routinization of charisma." A great spiritual leader, who is either divine or gifted of the divine, appears to a people. The original followers set down their recollections and these, in turn, are applied to current situations. In time they become codified as doctrine and law. Future leaders are recruited and trained in the tenets of the faith. Rites of passage are developed for the followers. Codes of acceptable conduct evolve. But conflict over leadership succession is inevitable.

Often conflict centers on the effort to reach new people in new times with the immutable message of the divine. Sometimes this requires reassertion of the heritage, sometimes rethinking of the heritage. Leaders make difficult decisions; some lose their

posts. Followers often have to modify their notions of social boundaries on the church. The struggles between order and the spirit, between exclusivity and inclusivity, between catholicity and sectarianism, among authorities and sometimes between authority and people — such is the subject matter of religious histories.

In the Christian faith, the matter of boundary maintenance is doubly complicated because its central message includes both Law and Gospel, sin and grace. There is no compromise in the expression of standards, in the proclamation of God's will for the people. But there is recognition that each of us, daily or at one time or another, fails to meet the divine intent and is in need of forgiveness, reconciliation, wholeness. At times, the boundaries respond more to Law; at other times, it seems, a compassionate church welcomes back all those who fall short of the ideal.

In the Roman Catholic tradition the matter of social boundary maintenance is also complicated by hierarchical authority ministering to a universal church. The theologian Karl Rahner has pointed to two ages of the church — first in a Mediterranean, then in a European setting — when both Gospel message and cultural consensus could become embedded in church authority. But in the current age of the church — a world church — the Gospel message seeks autonomy from Mediterranean or European cultural constrictions, and seeks to infuse a wide variety of other cultures — Asian, African, Latin American, and English-speaking — with its kerygmatic authority. In this age, central symbols such as Body of Christ or People of God mean quite different things to Catholics of different cultures. Definitions of "who is a true Catholic" become more complex because, although propounded by a Magisterium, they are applied by regional bishops, local priests, other parish leaders, and in fact *by the people themselves*.

In maintaining the boundaries of acceptable belief and behavior, it has been observed, there are three options: force, law, or consensus. This report examines *consensus*. It assesses how registered parishioners, volunteer leaders, paid staff, and pastors respond to a variety of questions regarding who is a true Catholic.

Data Sources and Caveats

The questions we used are detailed in Table 1. The survey of Catholic Parish Life from which they are taken was conducted in late 1983-early 1984 in 36 U.S. parishes. The respective sample sizes, the methods of selection, and the limitations of the data have been described in earlier reports. Readers are reminded that those surveyed are active registered parishioners and their leaders in non-Hispanic parishes. They present an important picture of the American church, but the findings are not representative of all Americans who call themselves "Catholic" on general population surveys.

The study of the boundaries of the church is not new to sociologists of religion. Pioneering research on Catholics, for example, was conducted by Jesuit sociologist Joseph Fichter in the 1940s and 1950s. He found that the definition of a good Catholic focused

primarily on liturgical, sacramental, and institutional matters-regular attendance at mass, confession, Catholic education, etc. Most recently, on the other hand, the *National Catholic Reporter* (NCR September 11, 1987) described a 1987 Gallup survey of adult American Catholics conducted for NCR and a team of sociologists headed by William D'Antonio. Their data indicated that the liturgical and sacramental definitions of being a good Catholic were now viewed as less important than complying with church teaching on abortion and helping the poor. According to their tables, believing in the infallibility of the pope was not far behind.

The results of such studies depend on the sample, the range of issues included, and the wording of the questions. We did not ask some of the questions on the original Fichter surveys, nor all of those later devised for the NCR/Gallup poll. We did, however, include a larger range of "cultural" issues. We were trying to determine the extent to which being "a good member of the Catholic church" is a function of following mandated or desired church practices or is a function of "being a respectable citizen in American society."

We also experimented with different wordings during our pretests and settled on the "true Catholic" wording. It carries perhaps a bit stronger connotation of insider-outsider, when one uses the term "true" rather than "good" in a religious context. At the same time, it does not go the rest of the way in the juridical direction as such terms as "in good standing" or "should be excommunicated" would suggest. Ours is also a measure of behavior, including no questions about the content of religious beliefs or ecclesiology. Given the American cultural propensity to judge people religiously by what they *do* rather than by the hidden beliefs they hold, we felt a behavioral measure was reasonable. Therefore, our question wording should be interpreted as a somewhat stricter standard by which to judge Catholic *behavior* than has been used on general population surveys, but it is quite limited in tapping privately-held beliefs.

No one should misunderstand this research as an attempt to set church boundaries by public opinion. Church leadership has the authority to set boundaries. What this report does is to explore common understandings about being a true Catholic among various levels of involvement in American parishes. It tells a great deal about the extent to which church teaching has penetrated American Catholic culture and the extent to which cultural standards are imposed on fellow church members. It also offers some insights into the paradox of sin and grace in the local church.

Boundaries on Catholic Behavior:
The Parishioners

The actual wording of our questions, the issues, and the initial four response categories are presented in Table 1. If respondents took the time to tell us that such matters should not be judged, we included that as a response category. The issues are presented in order from the most inclusive to the most exclusive definition of who is a true Catholic. The final column, "Mean score," represents average response on that item

ranging from " 1 " for most inclusive (Definitely yes) to "4" for most exclusive (Definitely no). Thus, the higher scores toward the bottom of the table indicate that Catholic parishioners set stricter boundaries on those behaviors than on the behaviors at the top of the list.

TABLE 1

TRUE CATHOLICS, AS JUDGED BY 2667 PARISHIONERS

Q. In your judgment, should persons be considered true Catholics, if they:

	Refuse to judge	*Def. yes*	*I think so*	*I don't think so*	*Def. no*	*Mean score*
Oppose nuclear disarmament	1%	29%	43%	17%	10%	2.12
Are married "outside" the church	1	17	38	28	16	2.47
Commit "minor" crimes	1	13	43	26	17	2.50
Rarely go to Mass	1	14	36	35	14	2.52
Oppose racial integration	1	10	27	38	23	2.79
Live together outside marriage	1	10	29	30	31	2.87
Commit "serious" crimes	1	9	23	28	39	3.02
Practice homosexuality	1	7	25	28	39	3.02
Urge or undergo abortion	1	6	19	29	45	3.17

The data indicate that values related to sexuality set the strictest definitions on who is a true Catholic. Such issues as abortion, homosexuality, and cohabitation are all on the more exclusive bottom half of the table. It is interesting to note that an issue deriving as much from civil society as from church teaching — commit "serious" crimes — is located among the exclusionary judgments.

On the other hand, the more strictly institutional religious matters appear on the top half of the table, i.e., Catholic parishioners are more willing to tolerate deviance from the ideal in these behaviors. In the judgment of at least half the parishioners, marrying outside the church and infrequent Mass attendance are not grounds for exclusion from the ranks of true Catholics. Minor crimes are also more tolerable.

Two important political and social issues in the United States — nuclear disarmament and racial integration — have received considerable attention from the American bishops in the last two decades. A recent pastoral letter scored the nuclear build-up policies of the superpowers and called for disarmament. Interpretations of national surveys conducted in 1983 and 1984 have suggested that the pastoral on nuclear disarmament had considerable impact on American Catholics. Yet the NCR/Gallup poll suggests that only one-third of those who call themselves Catholic on a national survey

had heard of the peace pastoral. Our data suggest that only slightly over one-fourth of registered Catholic parishioners would treat one's position on nuclear disarmament as a valid test of whether or not one is a true Catholic. Racial integration is quite another matter; over 60% of the registered parishioners would not consider those who oppose racial integration to be true Catholics. We cannot be certain whether respondents had difficulty with our wording of the disarmament issue, or whether indeed parishioners allow other Catholics a wider range of approaches to peace than to racial matters.

We suspect, however, that the placement of abortion at the most restrictive end and nuclear disarmament at the least restrictive end testifies that not all active Catholics have linked the two together as "human life" issues. For many, abortion is still perceived as a human sexuality issue. Or if the linkage has been made, some parishioners are suggesting that the protection of innocent human life in the fetus is more valuable than the protection of innocent human life within nations who have competing political values. Perhaps the huge gap between the abortion and the disarmament responses also has to do with policy complexity and individual responsibility. Abortion may be perceived as within the control of the individual and, therefore, a matter of moral accountability, whereas nuclear armaments are matters of statecraft, beyond individual control or accountability. Social sin may be perceived as a sin only if it can be laid at the feet of specific individuals.

The prominence of sexuality as a basis for judging "true Catholics" comes as no surprise to sociologists of religion. Reviewing numerous studies of the consequences of religious values for the social and political attitudes and behaviors of Americans, Dean Hoge has found that the linkage is far stronger between religion and marriage/sexuality than between religion and politics/economics. Working with a Catholic subsample of national surveys, Leege, Welch, and Trozzolo found that Catholics who "married within the faith" held values on marriage and family issues more consistent with church teaching, but that Catholics who "married outside the faith" had values on justice and peace issues more consistent with church teaching. Studies both by Jelen and by Peterson and Takayama have shown that the "seamless garment' on human life issues has not yet been woven for most Catholics.

Thus, many kinds of reinforcing evidence suggest that a true Catholic, in the minds of parishioners, is defined more by sexual behaviors than by institutional practices. Where those judgments about sexual behavior become a central focus of church organizational efforts — e.g., the anti-abortion campaign — or they are reinforced by the outside culture — e.g., homophobia — they become powerful bases for defining the boundaries of the church.

It may seem remarkable to some that, in a church two millennia old, faith and liturgy are less prominent in defining a true Catholic than is personal behavior-abortion-that connects moral teaching about human life with a current American political issue. But as Weber and Tocqueville observed long ago, in America religion is defined less by sacramental beliefs than by righteous behavior.

Accounting for Social Boundaries

The preceding discussion testifies that boundary definitions differ from item to item, but the discussion does not capture substantial differences among parishioners in the assessment of behaviors that make one a true Catholic. Some Catholics use strict, exclusive definitions of boundaries. Others accept or tolerate wide ranges of institutional and social behavior. What characteristics of parishioners account for such differences in social boundary definitions? To help interpret parishioners' perceptions of who is a true Catholic we have examined a variety of personal and social characteristics, religious beliefs and practices, and attitudes toward change in the Catholic Church and society.

Personal and *social characteristics* include *age*, *sex*, level of *education* completed, *ethnic background*, and family *income* level. In our early analyses, we also used the extensiveness of one's experience with Catholic schools. Somewhat to our surprise Catholic schooling *of itself* accounted for little in the strictness of boundary definitions, but was compounded within such other factors as age and educational achievement.

The measures of *religious beliefs* and *practices* include several that have appeared in earlier reports: (1) the *imagery* one uses to describe God, introduced to readers in Report 11 (seven factors labeled God as Father, God as Companion, God as Savior, a remote God, God as Judge, God as a metaphysical force, and God as Mother); (2) *devotional style*, used in several earlier reports but also elaborated in Report 11 (five factors summarizing one's religious practices, including traditional public devotionalism, evangelical-style devotionalism, outreach through sharing the faith, minimal practices limited to Mass and communion, and exposure to mass media ministries); (3) *foundational religious beliefs*, as reported also in Report 11 (whether fundamental perceptions of human existence and salvation are individualistic, communitarian, or integrate the two; (4) *closeness to God*, as described in Report 11 (whether one feels closest to God in a variety of spiritual exercises, or in charitable acts and the works of justice); (5) whether God gave us strict *rules to live by*, or whether these are situationally determined, or ideals; and (6) the degree of *attachment* one feels toward his/her parish, as described in Report 10.

Attitudes toward change in the Catholic Church and society are exemplified in two ways: (1) the traditional self-classification of *political liberalism and conservatism*, also described in Report 11; and (2) a new measure derived from the questions analyzed in Report 7, *orientations toward Church positions and policies*. Analysis of the thirteen statements (such as encouraging a "people orientation" rather than a legalistic orientation, stressing a personal relationship to Christ, listening to the voice of the laity, encouraging popular participation in liturgies, liberalizing the position on divorce, opening the priesthood to women and married men, encouraging inter-communion, etc.) produced three factors. The first factor seeks to push the mood of Vatican II reform further with increased roles for the laity, opening up the priesthood beyond unmarried males, ecumenism, and so forth. The second embraces the spirit of Vatican II primarily in its

people-orientation, its spiritual, lay, and family emphases, but is not especially restless for greater change. The third is more traditionalist, opposed to further changes and pushing for a return to pre-Vatican II legalistic and juridical emphases.

In the language of social research, we conducted *multiple regression* analyses using all of these characteristics of parishioners as independent variables and each of the nine questions about true Catholics as dependent variables. We used rather stringent standards to measure statistical significance (we had to be confident that a finding other than the one we observed would occur less than 1 out of 1000 times) and of substantive relationship (the regression coefficient had to be greater than .10). Despite these conservative standards, we found that several parishioner characteristics predicted very well their positions on social boundaries of the church.

The strongest predictors overall came from parishioners' orientations toward Church policies and positions. Those with a traditionalist, magisterial orientation to the Church were highly restrictive in their definitions of a true Catholic across all behaviors except minor crimes, integration, and disarmament. The strongest relationship for this group is found on the items concerning sexuality. On the other hand, those with a desire for the greatest change in Church positions and policies were often just the opposite in their definitions of church boundaries. They did not feel that the behaviors related to sexuality and crimes were bases for exclusion from the category "true Catholic." For the in-between group only the relationship on civil marriages was strong, and it was not viewed as a basis for exclusion.

The second best predictor was the image of God as Judge. Those who thought of God as Judge were quite likely to dismiss from the ranks of true Catholics all those who failed to meet institutional standards regarding liturgy, marriage and sexuality, and societal standards on crime, but the standards did not apply to integration and disarmament. This seems to be an interesting twist on the Biblical advice: "Judge not that ye be not judged." Those who think of God as a judge rather than as a caring mother or a companion, for example, are also very judgmental toward fellow Catholics. We cannot tell whether they are judgmental because they are Pharisaical or because they are loving and they worry about the salvation of lapsed brothers and sisters in Christ. Only in isolated instances did the other images of God predict well the social boundaries of the church.

Of the personal and social characteristics, income level shows strong effects on all of the items except Mass attendance. In each case, the higher the income the more inclusive or less judgmental the parishioner. Age and, to some extent, education are important in understanding boundary definitions involving sexual behavior. Older and less educated parishioners are more judgmental.

Those who feel God gave us strict rules to live by are strongly judgmental on the sexuality questions. To some extent, the political conservatives are in the same category.

Even one's religious *practices* tell something about who is to be included or excluded from the definition of a true Catholic. Those who either limit their religious practices to Mass and communion or who practice traditional devotions such as Rosary, Benediction, etc. are very restrictive in their judgments about Mass attendance, civil marriages, premarital cohabitation, abortion and homosexuality. Those who enjoy sharing their faith with others are far less judgmental.

Because there seemed to be recurrent patterns in our data, we decided to see whether we could develop a summary set of boundary definitions, and then examine what kinds of people tended to be in each type. We used what social scientists call *cluster analysis* and *discriminant analysis* for this purpose; a four-cluster solution worked quite well. Each group and its characteristics are described be low; it must be stressed that these are only tendencies and not fixed groups.

1. *The strict social boundary maintainers*. Sixty-one percent of the parishioners are best classified within this group. They are more likely to exclude others from the category "true Catholic" across most of the issues. They tend to score higher on the traditionalist opposition to change factor, are older, less educated, with lower incomes, think of God as a judge and a clear rule-giver, are more likely to practice traditional devotions, and to feel close to God in spiritual rather than charitable or justice-oriented activities.

2. *Social boundaries defined not by sexual or civil practices, but by liturgical and social justice behaviors*. This group includes 25% of the parishioners and is more clearly defined by its characteristics. It is the opposite of the first group. It dismisses traditionalist approaches to church policies and positions, does not practice the traditional forms of public devotionalism, and advocates far more change. It is composed of parishioners who are younger, more highly educated, with higher incomes. Its members do not see God primarily as a judge; they think that God set ideals but we must faithfully apply them to new situations. Its members are more likely to call themselves political liberals or moderates and to experience closeness to God in charitable and justice-oriented activities.

3. *Social boundaries are defined on sexuality issues alone*. Ten percent of the parishioners are best classified within this group, and its characteristics are not so firmly fixed as the second group. Its members are quite open on liturgical, civil, and political questions, but are very restrictive on sexual questions. It tends to be composed of men of slightly higher income, from the earlier-assimilated ethnic groups, who are political conservatives and individualistic in their foundational religious beliefs. They do not feel close to God in charitable or social justice activities, nor can they conceive of God as a maternal, nurturing person.

4. *Absence of social boundaries on the church*. This is a small group of only 4% of the parishioners, but they are rather clearly defined by their devotional characteristics. They do not have a particularly strong attachment to their own parishes but practice their religiosity through Bible study, prayer groups, witness and faith sharing. They are more

likely to be women and to think of God as a companion in their daily lives. They are the Catholic parishioners least likely to exclude others from the body of "true Catholics." They come from no particular educational or social class or age group, but practice a distinct evangelical style of religiosity.

No sets of classifications based on social data are perfectly fixed. Social life is too complex and our measurement procedures too imprecise to permit the certitude we have from other kinds of scientific analyses. Yet, such procedures as these do allow insights into how Catholic parishioners draw social boundaries around the church and what kinds of judgments they make about the behavior of other Catholics. Do such judgments differ by the level of involvement in the parish? Do pastors, for example, make more restrictive judgments than ordinary parishioners? Do lay leaders have viewpoints closer to pastors or to the laity?

Boundaries on Catholic Behavior: A Comparison with Leaders

In Table 2 we provide a comparison between the mean scores for parishioners on each issue, with the mean scores of unpaid lay leaders, paid staff, and pastors. Recalling from our discussion of Table 1, the lower the mean score the more inclusive the definition of a true Catholic; the higher the mean score, the more exclusive the definition. The figures in parentheses are standard deviations of the means; this can be taken as a measure of the degree of consensus or agreement among the people in each level of leadership. The lower the score, the greater the agreement; the higher the score, the greater the disagreement.

In all columns the samples are aggregated for comparison. While this procedure may introduce some statistical mismatches because the proportion of leaders in a smaller parish may be slightly larger than the proportion of leaders in a larger parish, in general, leadership samples increased with parish size. Thus, a handful of parishes is not disproportionately biasing the results in the aggregated leadership columns.

TABLE 2
TRUE CATHOLICS, A COMPARISON BY LEVELS OF
LEADERSHIP IN THIRTY-SIX PARISHES

| | *Mean Score* | | |
| | *(Degree of Consensus in Parentheses)* | | |
	Parishioners	*Volunteer Leaders*	*Paid Staff*	*Pastors*
Oppose nuclear disarmament	2.12 (.981)	2.20 (1.096)	2.16 (.969)	2.00 (.866)

Are married "outside" the church	2.47 (.995)	2.67 (1.053)	2.56 (.998)	2.39 (1.029)
Commit minor" crimes	2.50 (.964)	2.51 (1.019)	2.38 (1.035)	2.03 (.883)
Rarely go to Mass	2.52 (.946)	2.80 (.942)	2.74 (.923)	2.76 (.936)
Oppose racial integration	2.79 (.959)	2.91 (.999)	2.88 (-968)	2.65 (-917)
Live together outside marriage	2.87 (1.005)	2.97 (1.030)	2.88 (1.067)	2.68 (1.007)
Commit serious crimes	3.02 (1.009)	3.05 (1.040)	2.79 (1.103)	2.46 (1.003)
Practice homosexuality	3.02 (.987)	3.11 (1.035)	2.62 (1.080)	2.53 (1.022)
Urge or undergo abortion	3.17 (.953)	3.37 (.936)	3.16 (1.047)	2.97 (1.029)

The most obvious differences across the levels of leadership concern the volunteers and the pastors. On every issue, the volunteers have the most restrictive definition of who is a true Catholic while, on all but one, the pastors have the least restrictive definition.

There are a couple of reasons why one might expect lay leaders to be more restrictive in their definitions of social boundaries than other laypersons in the parish: (1) the social characteristics and religious values of lay volunteers are more conducive to restrictiveness (e.g., they are older, less committed to the continuation of Vatican II reforms, think of God as more judge-like); (2) volunteers are selected for leadership positions because they are more likely to embrace and express boundary-maintaining definitions of true Catholicism.

The first is simply wrong. Volunteer leaders are about the same median age as ordinary parishioners, although they are far more likely to come from the age cohort 40 to 60. And unlike those kinds of parishioners who offer restrictive definitions of true Catholics, volunteers are slightly more likely to seek continuation of Vatican II reforms and less likely to underscore the authority of the Magisterium, are slightly less likely to think of God as judge-like, are less likely to say that God has given us strict rules to live by and more likely to treat these rules as ideals, are more likely to espouse middle-of-the road political positions, and are far better educated and from higher income families. In short, the predictors of restrictiveness that worked well for ordinary parishioners work poorly for the unpaid lay leaders. Then why do lay leaders offer such restrictive definitions of true Catholics?

Perhaps it can be found in the recruitment process. The leaders may not have the social and religious characteristics that predict restrictive views on church boundaries; nevertheless, those who have restrictive views will eventually move into parish leadership

posts. Whether selected or elected, the lay leaders may be seen as paragons of the church, as shining examples of what it means to be a Catholic, and as people who will set high standards for other Catholics. St. Paul's advice in his letter to Timothy regarding the selection of deacons is often taken as the ideal in the selection of local church leaders: they hold to the faith with complete sincerity, are of serious outlook, sober, not adulterers, possessed of discretion, not seeking money or status, and having proven themselves worthy of confidence in probationary capacities.

One way of seeing whether primarily certain types of Catholics move to parish leadership statuses is to compare different patterns of recruitment. About two-thirds of those identified as the most influential leaders in the parish claim that they were *asked* to serve in their current position by the pastor or another member of the parish staff. One-third were true volunteers; they simply offered their services. Interestingly, when contrasted with the true volunteers, those who were asked to serve have a somewhat longer history of occupying leadership posts, i.e., in the language of Paul to Timothy, they have occupied probationary statuses. Their current positions are also more prominent in the parish hierarchy. But most important, across all nine issues listed in Table 2 those lay persons who feel they were recruited by pastors and staff for top leadership posts are strikingly more restrictive in their boundary definitions than are those who simply offered their services. In fact, the true volunteers have patterns of response that are closer to the inclusive definitions offered by pastors than to the more restrictive definitions offered either by ordinary parishioners or the volunteer leaders who felt they were recruited to their posts.

There is something of a paradox in these data. Some might argue that pastors and staff will try to recruit restrictive Catholics to leadership positions. Yet the pastors themselves are far more inclusive than the people who are recruited. Another interpretation is that Catholic lay leaders who are restrictive in their boundary definition feel more secure with the perception that "they are serving Father" in their leadership capacity and thus legitimate themselves as leaders through the rationalization that the pastor or his close staff recruited them. Some might argue that it is so hard to get anyone to serve in the parish that pastors will encourage all comers, regardless of their viewpoints. All of these interpretations may be plausible, but there is an additional argument that is grounded in empirical social theory. We think that both the frame of reference and the pattern of socialization for pastors and lay leaders differs substantially and helps to account for the wide differences in their mean scores.

Pastors are professionals. They are trained to think of the church primarily as a religious institution. They hold up the vision of God's intent but, in the Christian faith, they are in the profession of offering God's grace to broken individuals. They may convey a message full of standards but they know in the end that they must assure people of forgiveness, of a God who never forsakes us. But to pastors, it is especially important that the people avail themselves of the visible means of God's grace. Thus, the mean score for pastors on "rarely go to Mass" is higher than on all other issues except abortion. Furthermore, the civil and cultural bases for exclusion become far less important than they

were for the laity, and so the two "crime" scores are much lower and the political/social issues scores are slightly lower. Even the sexuality scores are considerably lower than for the laity.

The lay leaders, on the other hand, are not so directly in the profession of offering God's grace. They are aware of the standards set by church teaching, they try to adhere to them, and they expect other Catholics to do so. They are recruited from the leadership strata of American society and are better acculturated to the responsibilities of civil life. Neither seminary training nor parish responsibilities makes them so tuned in to the constant need for forgiveness. George C. Homans in his classic *The Human Group* studied similar types of people in several settings; social scientists have developed the concept 'anticipatory socialization' to describe this type of behavior. Lay leaders are not at the top level of leadership in the parish because that is occupied by the pastor. But they emulate what they perceive to be the values of the church and are far more restrictive in their judgments of who is in and who is out. In the case of our Study, the phenomenon is even more exaggerated because we have so many cultural behavior issues and so few religious belief/institutional behavior issues.

Do these findings mean that lay leaders are zealots and pastors are lax in their maintenance of boundaries? Hardly. But it does suggest that the paradox of order and grace, so fundamental to Christian identity and history is served in different ways by church professionals and active laity. It is no coincidence that the most sectarian churches — those with the most rigid definitions of who is in and who is out — are often lay-dominated and have relatively brief training periods before candidates are declared clergy. Even in large, well-established bodies with distinct clergy and longer training such as The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and the Southern Baptist Convention, the recent leadership transitions to those who wanted more rigid definitions of faithfulness were spearheaded by laity, or by clergy who recognized the laity as an organizational resource. It is also worth observing that, in Catholic circles, movements aimed at purifying the church and restoring "true standards" are disproportionately led by laity. Lay leaders may lack the breadth of understanding — either of grace or of traditional authority — that their clergy have. Some forget that St. Paul spent another decade *after* his conversion quietly learning the tenets of the Christian faith before he left on his missions — and those missions expanded the boundaries of the church. The clergy, for their part, go through similar experiences: many is the priest who emerged from seminary full of judgments about "true Catholics," whose parish experience taught him that more are gained for the Kingdom by nurture and healing than by hellfire and brimstone.

Returning to Table 2, the paid staff and parishioners are usually somewhere in between the volunteer lay leaders and the pastors. As expected, on the issue having to do with access to the means of grace, staff are closer to the pastors than to the parishioners.

On most issues, pastors show greater consensus than do the laity or the volunteers. The major exceptions, however, are the issues dealing with sexuality, where the pastors

show less consensus than the laity. Otherwise no important patterns show in the degree of agreement on the issues.

If individuals at different levels of leadership differ substantially in their definition of true Catholics, can it be said that a *parish* as a whole is restrictive, while another is inclusive? Do pastors and parishioners share similar boundary definitions? Do parishes differ as a function of their social characteristics? To that we turn.

Social Boundaries and Parish Contexts

We used a variety of procedures to determine whether parishes differed in their prevailing definitions of a "true Catholic" and whether these differences could be traced to certain parish characteristics.

Because the sample sizes get too small to use the four-part typology discussed earlier in this report, we have analyzed parish averages (mean scores) and parishioner consensus (standard deviations) on each of the items from Table 1. The resulting tables for the 36 parishes are too cumbersome to reproduce here, so we will summarize them. We find that social boundary definitions do differ recognizably from parish to parish. Some are typically inclusive across all issues, some are exclusive across all, and some are inclusive or exclusive depending on the issue.

The greatest differences from parish to parish concern marriage outside the church, homosexuality, and premarital cohabitation. In a sense these may be considered the "transitional issues," i.e., the social boundaries of the church differ greatly according to the local parish. On other issues such as abortion there is little difference from parish to parish; parishioners think it is wrong to encourage or practice abortion and a person who does so is not a "true Catholic." That holds true in virtually all parishes. On still other issues such as committing minor crimes, rarely going to Mass, or opposing nuclear disarmament, there are noticeable but not great differences from parish to parish. A person who does these is more likely to be viewed as still a "true Catholic," regardless of the parish.

The level of consensus within parishes is relatively high, does not differ a great deal by issue, but does differ considerably by parish. As might be expected, the socially homogeneous parishes that are more isolated from the cross-currents of society are somewhat more likely to show greater consensus in their definitions of social boundaries. For example, a parish on the plains made up of German farmers whose pastor has served them for a long time has very similar viewpoints regardless of the issue. On the other hand, a suburban parish composed of highly mobile families of corporate managers as well as older parishioners who have lived there for a long time has far less consensus on the issues.

Is there any relationship between the sense of community people feel within the parish and the inclusive or exclusive definitions its people set on who is a true Catholic?

There clearly is. We have compared parish averages for the sense of community (discussed in Report 10) with parish averages for each of the nine "true Catholic" issues shown in Table 1. Using (nonparametric) statistical tests to describe the relationships between sense of community and social boundaries, we find strong, statistically significant relationships on five of the nine issues and a more modest but significant relationship on two more.

The parishes that express a stronger sense of community are likely to have parishioners who draw boundaries less strict on premarital cohabitation, marriage outside the church, abortion, homosexuality, and regular Mass attendance. To a lesser extent they are also not so strict about people who commit major crimes, but *are* more concerned about Catholics who oppose desegregation. (Recall, however, that the Black parishes generally displayed a higher sense of community.) People in parishes where a weaker sense of community is prevalent are more judgmental, particularly on the human sexuality issues, Mass attendance, and marriage outside the church. Among them, however, there is little relationship between sense of community and judgments about Catholics who oppose nuclear disarmament or commit minor crimes.

Even stronger are the batteries of correlations describing parishioners' views of what makes a good parish priest and their judgments about "true Catholics." We asked parishioners to rank by importance the following characteristics of a parish priest: learning, sensitivity to others' needs, holiness, humanity, good preacher, good listener, good organizer, middle of the road views, patience, and sense of humor. We then calculated parish averages for each characteristic and compared these with their social boundary judgments. For the thirty-six parishes, 71 of the 90 possible correlations were highly significant and many were of great strength.

The parish context makes considerable difference. What parishioners want in their pastor is often closely related to their judgments about fellow Catholics. Those parishes where parishioners want their priest to be humane, sensitive to others' needs, a good listener, and possessed of a sense of humor are far less likely to be judgmental about other Catholics, particularly on the sexuality issues. Those parishes whose parishioners most want their pastor to be *holy* are far more likely to be judgmental of fellow Catholics, not only on sexuality issues but also on Mass attendance and criminal conduct.

Are the pastor's own views on social boundaries generally consistent with and perhaps determinative of the parish atmosphere? These are much more difficult questions to assess. Recall our earlier finding that pastors, on the whole, are more tolerant on the social boundary questions than are the laity. They deal daily with the means of grace. As one told us, "It is my duty to offer God's healing to all kinds — and this is not a parish made up of saints." How they offer forgiveness differs a lot. For some pastors, it comes "with no prerequisites." For others, considerable instruction of the lapsed Catholic precedes full inclusion. For another, the way "to make sure people live right" is "to instruct them with the Baltimore catechism" and to hold classes year after year on marriage and the family. He expresses his concern that the main reason his people fall from grace is that they are "unequally yoked in marriage."

Another reason it is difficult to measure the pastor's impact on the flock on social boundary questions is that pastors are frequently reassigned, and one cannot assume that current parishioner attitudes are the result of the current pastor's attitudes and teaching.

Indeed we think the mobility of pastors is the primary reason that we cannot discern a clear pattern across the thirty-six parishes that relates the pastor's boundary definitions to the parishioners' boundary definitions. There are isolated instances where the relationship is very clear. For example, the pastor who uses the Baltimore catechism has been with his parish for many years and they consistently have the most restrictive definitions of "true Catholics." Likewise, a pastor who insists that his parishioners attend Mass but does not draw strict boundaries on the other questions has served for some time a medium-sized parish composed of well-educated, religiously active, high-income professionals and they have the least restrictive definitions across all issues that we found in any parish. Still another pastor who was recently assigned a large suburban parish draws no boundaries — saying these judgments belong to American culture, not to the church — and his flock is among the least restrictive. On the other hand, two recently assigned pastors of small parishes have highly restrictive boundary definitions that are in sharp contrast to their parishioners' inclusive views; one says his parish would be better off if he could get rid of all but a dozen of the people and "start from scratch. They don't know what it means to be Catholic and don't want to know." Most parishes, however, have pastors roughly matched on some boundary definitions but mismatched on others.

Parishes seem to have a life of their own. When small and served for a long time by a pastor with restrictive views, the parishioners may sound like him. But then again, they may have had his views before he ever arrived. When large and at the crossroads of many social changes that Catholics have experienced in American society, the parish may be more inclusive but it is seldom served nowadays by a pastor who draws strict social boundaries across all issues. Parishes differ, perhaps sometimes because of a pastor, but more often because of the people who pass in and out and who mix with those who are there forever.

Thus, rather than concluding that pastors routinely shape their flocks regarding who is a "true Catholic," we conclude that there are stronger connections between social boundaries, the sense of community people feel in a parish, and what they want from their pastor. To be sure, there are a few restrictive parishes that value holiness in their pastor and still feel a sense of community within strictly defined social boundaries. Most parishes that feel a sense of community, however, are quite inclusive and value the pastor's "people skills." We suspect, but cannot document from this Study, that matching the views of pastors and parishioners is one consideration in the pastoral assignment process. If that is the case, we have found *serious* mismatches only in parishes where the alternative would have been to assign no priest at all to the parish. Perhaps, then, instead of measuring how the pastor molds the parishioners it would make more sense to understand how the flock shapes the shepherd.

Some Perspectives on the Findings

The introduction to this report cautioned that it was addressed to a sensitive question: who is a true Catholic? Within the range of questions we have posed, the findings are clear enough: in the perceptions of the laity, a true Catholic is defined by a range of sexual practices. In particular, a true Catholic ought not have had or supported abortion, or practiced homosexuality. The findings also indicated that the abortion judgment was not linked in a consistent pattern to the "preservation-of-innocent-human-life" principle embedded in the pastoral letter addressed to nuclear warfare. Further, the findings demonstrated that frequent Mass attendance was not perceived as part of the central definition of a true Catholic. For a church where sacramental and liturgical life are at the heart of the faith community, that may seem an odd finding. Finally, pastors were found to be less restrictive than laity on all matters except the need for sacramental faithfulness, while lay leaders were the most restrictive on most issues.

What one makes of such findings will differ with one's vantage point. The Catholic moral theologian may be dismayed that the laity show evidence of placing the *application* higher than the *principle*. That is, the reason for concern about abortion is that it involves the application of the human life principle. Yet it seems more caught up in judgments about responsible sexuality. And the principle is hard for the laity to find when the application is nuclear warfare. More than one moral theologian has expressed the concern that the church's social teaching authority has stressed specific applications rather than the clear enunciation of principles, with the result that the laity simply apply legalistic litmus tests rather than make mature moral judgments in specific cases.

Ecclesiologists may be troubled that the sacramental core of the Church is of far less moment to the laity than is righteous sexual or civil behavior. Other social and political institutions can offer correctives for sexual and civil misconduct. Only the Church can offer God's grace.

Social scientists, always tentative about any finding, may find a bias in the ways questions were asked and results were interpreted. They may argue that the reason pastors are less restrictive is that they deal daily with the consequences of sin and guilt. The Law condemns; people who fail to live up to God's intent are confused, adrift, and often broken and crushed by their failing. But the ministries of God's grace heal and restore. Pastors cannot be restrictive because they *see* the need more than do any others in the church. The laity and especially lay leaders, on the other hand, are less likely to encounter these desperate lives. If they did, social scientists might argue, they too would be more compassionate and less restrictive. They may hold most rigidly to their abortion definition because they are least likely to have experienced it intimately. And they may be much freer in their Mass attendance judgment because they have encountered friends and family who have been lax, and they don't want to exclude loved one's from the Catholic community. That may indeed be true.

Progressive Catholics may be unnerved to find that lay leaders are so restrictive in their definition of a true Catholic. Progressives generally welcome increasing parish responsibility for the laity and are confident that such a church will be more compassionate and responsive to human needs. Perhaps their vision of the church would be better served by compassionate priests, or perhaps the laity need more *experience* in ministering to the needs of broken human beings so that the meaning of grace and reconciliation becomes more personal to them. In this view, the training of lay leaders should include not only instruction in church teaching but also experience with pastoral practice.

Finally, other Catholics may not rest secure until the laity and their parish leaders have all embraced restrictive definitions of who is a true Catholic. Those who fail to conform are out. Ours is an age of great moral anxiety. Perhaps that is a natural condition in a country where we have historically worn our righteousness on our sleeves. Some will turn to a Magisterium who will define all moral applications; others, to a righteous President, Congress, and courts who will define acceptable behavior and punish lawbreakers; still others, to an Armageddon when the final showdown between good and evil will occur. Alas, for a Catholic Church struggling with human culture through time, if there were no moral ambiguity, there would be no need for reason or for grace. And so the effort to define and maintain the boundaries of the church recurs in every age and every country — and even every parish.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

PREVIOUS REPORTS

Report #1
The U.S. Parish 20 Years After Vatican II:
An Introduction to the Study

Report #2
A Profile of American Catholic Parishes and Parishioners:
1820s to the 1980s

Report #3
Participation in Catholic Parish Life:
Religious Rites and Parish Activities in the 1980s

Report #4
Religious Values and Parish Participation:
The Paradox of Individual Needs in a Communitarian Church

Report #5
The Celebration of Liturgy in the Parishes

Report #6
Of Piety and Planning:
Liturgy, the Parishioners, and the Professionals

Report #7
The People, Their Pastors, and the Church:
Viewpoints on Church Policies and Positions

Report #8
Parish Organizations: People's Needs,
Parish Services, and Leadership

Report #9
Parish Life Among the Leaders

Report #10
The Parish as Community

Report #11
Catholics and the Civic Order;
Parish Participation, Politics and Civic Participation