

'The perfume of virtue far excels the fragrance of sandalwood, tagara, water-lily and jasmine' (55).

'Though one should conquer in battle a million men, he indeed is the greatest victor who has conquered himself' (103).

'Just as a merchant with a small escort and great wealth would avoid a perilous route, or one who loves his life would avoid poison, so should one avoid evil' (123).

'The man of little learning grows old like the ox : his bulk increases, but not his wisdom' (152).

'There never was, there never will be, nor is there today a man who is wholly blamed or wholly praised' (228).

'As an elephant in battle withstands an arrow shot from a bow, so will I endure abuse : many people are indeed wicked' (320).

'Excellent are well-tamed mules; so are the thoroughbred horses of Sindh and Kunjara elephants; but greater far is he who has gained mastery over self' (322).

'Formerly this mind wandered where it willed, as it wished, and at its pleasure. Now I shall wisely control it, as does the mahout the elephant in rut' (326).

We have indicated briefly the main features of the *Dhammapada* and the nature of its contents. A Buddhist layman in Colombo, Dr Cassius A. Pereira, once wrote of it : 'If I were to name any book from the whole Tipitaka as having been of most service to me, I should without hesitation choose the *Dhammapada*'.¹⁵ Many a devout Buddhist would say the same.

¹⁵In the foreword to *The Dhammapada*, translation and notes by Narada Thera, introduction by Dr. E. J. Thomas, London, 1954. Dr Cassius A. Pereira later became a Buddhist monk as Kassapa Thera.

Sociology: Friend or Foe?

by W. S. F. Pickering

Sociology is not a universally beloved human science. It may have gained prestige in some quarters in recent years but it has enemies and opponents, who believe that in the long run sociology does more harm than good. During the past year the Chilean generals removed it with good reason from the universities and have declared null and void all degrees heretofore awarded in the subject. In some of the ways in which it has developed during the past half century, it can

rightly be called a science of debunking. The movement in part started with Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) who made it his task to explain the non-rational, non-scientific nature of ideologies, and similarly much in thought and action that is said to be based on the obvious, the rational, and the true. In a different direction, sociological surveys have pricked other kinds of bubbles, and by the use of statistics, interviews, and other 'factual' devices, they have been able to mirror the gap between the ideal and the real, between the image and what actually occurs, between social intention and social achievement. One contemporary example can be seen in the analysis of local government. The procedures and decisions that are made by the authorities are very far from being democratic, very far from taking into account the wishes of those for whom measures are enacted. An examination of the activities of the local town hall along with the experiences of those who are governed by it allow one to assume that Pareto was right—even in the heart of a country priding itself as being democratic, government is indeed carried out by an élite, professional or elected.

The other side of the coin is that sociologists shatter images but have nothing to offer in their place. Out of the holocaust that they create they do not present anything which is constructive or positive. This may be an oversimplification but it contains a great deal of truth. To be sure, many nineteenth century sociologists accepted revolutions as given facts—the French Revolution or the industrial revolution—and what they tried to do was to make a pathway to order and stability. Comte drew a blue-print of a positivist society and Durkheim wanted to see a society emerge based on restraint according to liberal, rationalist ideals. These attempts to be creative never received the acclaim that were accorded to their analyses of social behaviour. Most commentators would like to forget the efforts to reform and create. But there is another problem. The dilemma in which sociologists find themselves is that even if they do come up with ideas which might be seen to contribute to a solution, they are branded as interferers and ideologists, who introduce normative assumptions into their work. They are not scientists but politicians, and therefore their claim to objectivity becomes suspect. If the sociologist tries to remain factual he is criticised as a thorough-going debunker and cannot win in the face of those who hold power—the government officials, the bureaucrats, the professionals, whose images and ideologies become damaged by his work. He is an iconoclast: never a sculptor. Often in a naive way he wants to help and imagines in all honesty that what he does will in the long run be of direct, practical value. No wonder bureaucrats of many kinds cry out against exposure and criticise the non-constructive role of the sociologist. Of course they will welcome sociology if it can be used as a tool for

projection and planning, or for reconstruction, but not for anything else.

If this can be said about sociology working within a secular milieu, what greater condemnation awaits it in the realm of religion, and more particularly within the Catholic Church, where structures are given so sacred a weight? Debunkers here are certainly not welcome and it comes as little surprise to see that the Vatican has frequently condemned sociology (see, for example, *Times*, 4.12.1969). Doubtless sociology passes if it does not show too starkly the difference between the real and the ideal, if it does not reach radical conclusions, and if it constructively helps pastoral work. But that is to tie its hands. No sociologist wants to set out on his task knowing he is muzzled. But it is not only church leaders, dedicated to the institution, who cry words of warning, or who deliberately shun the presence of sociologists. No less a figure than Peter Berger himself, a liberal believer, has pointed to the challenge of sociology to both theological thought and ecclesiastical institution (*A Rumour of Angels*, p. 44 ff.). The sociological challenge constitutes a 'fiery brook' through which the theologian has, or should have to pass. The relativism of sociology, raised to unprecedented sharpness, is far more threatening to the man of faith than the attack, direct or indirect, from other sciences, be they natural or human sciences. Sociology is a challenge to survival. Plato would have forbidden it to the young! (*ibid.*, p. 55).

The varying fortunes of sociology within the Catholic Church since the end of World War II have yet to be carefully documented and analysed. That the sociology of religion, or more accurately religious sociology (intended to be of help to the Church), was more or less accepted and given standing was in some ways understandable. The Catholic Church, as compared with Protestant Churches, was initially drawn to sociology by the centrality the Church gives to the Institution. But it turned out to be an unstable alliance. There is still much to be learned about what went on behind the scenes where Boulard, Houtart, Pin and others worked, and in this country about the details of the rise and fall of the Newman Demographic Survey. The subsequent development of this whole field since the late 1960s has been subject to the winds of change as witnessed in the new look of the *Conférence Internationale de Sociologie Religieuse*, which originally brought together Catholic sociologists throughout Europe. The move has been one away from pastoral concern and towards a more academic approach to the sociology of religion. The pastoral orientation now seems to have disappeared. But in another part of the world there has recently appeared a closely documented account of the problems that have faced an indomitable sociologist, in fulfilling what he holds is his 'high calling' of relating sociology to the Church, and to social problems associated with it.

In the United States, the Jesuit, Joseph Fichter, is a popular and

respected sociologist. Indeed, since the late 1940s, his name has been synonymous with American Catholic sociology. While other Catholics, such as O'Dea, have written text-books on the sociology of religion, Fichter has made his name through research he began to carry out when he left Harvard in 1947. His most important and controversial work, *Southern Parish*, was planned to cover four volumes. Only one volume appeared, *Dynamics of a City Church*, in 1951. Those of us who knew Fichter gained some inkling of why silence followed the publication of the first volume. Now, more than twenty years later, he has revealed the circumstances of the suppression of the later books which would have contained further findings of his survey of the generally acclaimed successful parish of Mater Dolorosa, New Orleans.¹ Most of Fichter's energies, apart from teaching sociology in various universities, have been focused on surveys, and in his book we are presented not just with the beginnings, the intrigues and final collapse of his survey in Monsignor Pyzikiewicz's parish in New Orleans, but with similar background information on other surveys he carried out on desegregation in Catholic schools, arrests made by the local police force, attitudes of Catholic clergy, and the effectiveness of Jesuit High Schools. All in all, this sociology of ecclesiastical sociology, makes illuminating reading. It must confirm what many others have experienced who themselves have carried out such surveys, in the name of or hopefully for the Church. Fichter has been bold in publishing details, many of them highly personal, which raise moral problems about the suppression of knowledge. When *The Dynamics of a City Church* was published there were those outside the Catholic Church who felt that the project was a daring one in the light of the history of the Catholic Church. And they were right. Fichter set out to do what had never been done before, to describe in considerable detail the overt religious behaviour of parochial Catholicism. As well as portraying in theological and sociological terms Catholic worship and organisations, he mentioned amongst other things, the loss of children to the church after baptism, the numbers who miss their Easter duties, the reactions of children to their first confession, the average number of confessions per priest per hour (45), the average duration of Sunday mass (46 minutes, 42 seconds), the tactics used by mission priests, subjects of sermons, and so on. Such detailed description must have caused concern to many Catholics at that time and been of great interest to non-Catholic students of religion. However, this last book by Fichter may be said to be even more daring. Or, is it that times have so changed that nothing is subject to censure? Nothing constrained by propriety? The book is about the incredibly complicated wrangles between archbishop, priest, and Jesuit, and letters to

¹Joseph H. Fichter, *One-Man Research: Reminiscences of a Catholic Sociologist*. New York and London: Wiley, 1973, pp. 258 + vii. £5.95.

publishers, to provincials, and to Rome, and the 'final solution'. The conclusion to the controversy was that, after Fichter had the second book ready in manuscript form, he agreed not to publish any more volumes in the series. The authorities held it was necessary to have the permission of Monsignor Pyzikiewicz for publication to be granted. This he refused to give and the Jesuit general asked Fichter to obey the decision of his superiors that he voluntarily suppress further publication and that he turn his efforts and energies to other social problems in 'humility and obedience'. Certainly this energetic researcher did not undertake similar parish surveys but he did embark on projects which provoked ecclesiastical and civil opposition, though none as vigorous as that aroused by his *Southern Parish*.

Fichter writes honestly and simply, at times almost naively. Like all those who stand where he does, he wants and always has wanted to present the 'facts', and his conclusions are of the order: 'We still think that St Mary's should be ranked high among the successfully operating parishes of the diocese'. For him, the public proclamation of facts can do no harm: they are the *sine qua non* of reform. Fichter has never been interested in pure research: knowledge is to have a practical end. At heart, he is pastorally and politically oriented. In a truly liberal fashion, however, he would separate the obtaining of data from their application in engineering change. His task, as that of others who think like him, is to produce facts. Substantively his interests are religion, education and race. In such areas one aim is dominant, to show the relation between the ideal and the real, to declare to the world what is actually happening. Such an aim is almost identical to that which dominated the work of Charles Booth in England. Let the facts speak for themselves! In all these areas, particularly in the church, with its authoritarian and hierarchical structure, the ground Fichter treads on is holy ground. It is ground on which there are a number of religiously vested interests. Honours are not given to debunkers. What Fichter has done in his book is to make public by personal testimony and experience the hidden opposition which up to now has been so difficult to unearth and examine.

Those in secular and religious institutions, on whose shoulders leadership rests, seek to uphold and maintain the organisations for which they feel a responsibility. Indeed, the success of the institutions in some measure, but especially in a voluntarist milieu such as that in which the church finds itself, depends to a very large extent on the image the body projects onto society. Fichter seems to think that such bodies will openly accept the collecting and analysing of information about human groups as being totally desirable and contributing to publicly acclaimed truth. Leaders may employ sociologists and encourage them to do research but often only with the proviso, assumed or openly stated, that the results are not published—a fact that

workers such as Fichter have found after conducting surveys and not before. Publication may damage the image, and no one wants that, especially where the image is undergirded by norms of transcendental origin, or where the image itself is held to be sacred.

But there are many other issues which have always made for caution on the part of theologians towards sociology. They are too many to mention here. Some are national in character, as in England where is a general aversion to sociology itself, frequently voiced by those trained in the classics and literature, and, more widely, the question of Christian grace in relation to what seems nothing more than social determinism. But two problems are currently voiced by church leaders of all ranks, and in churches other than the Catholic Church. Fichter met them. The first could be summarised by the expression—'You are telling us nothing new'. Vast sums of money and time are consumed: the result is a description couched in quasi-scientific terms and backed by sophisticated statistics which in the sum brings to light nothing new, at least nothing startlingly new. All the sociologist succeeds in doing is to say 'this is this and that is that!' Thus, the reaction to many surveys is: 'Any priest or bishop knows that kind of thing'! Such criticism is loudly voiced in churches which are in decline, which are destined to become 'small churches', which are all too conscious of the gap between the ideal and the real, and in which the clergy are close to their people. The disclosure of facts tends to be more welcome among professional sociologists whose speciality is *not* religion than among ecclesiastics, and for the simple reason, that the 'situation' to the former is more often unknown, so that even descriptive surveys involving the simplest of correlations turn out to be interesting. Using the best tools he can lay his hands on, the sociologist of religion is more likely to receive a warm reception among his 'non-religious' colleagues than among religious leaders for whom he may be directly writing.

Secondly, the cry from the clergy, especially those alarmed by the diminution of the institutions they represent which provide them with their livelihood, is not one which calls for the discovery of facts but one which provides solutions, one which quickly helps them build up that which is crumbling at their very feet. Facts do not solve problems. Sociology will be appreciated by the clergy only to the extent to which it will help them in their work. Many clergy see themselves in a depressed occupation. Falling congregations, unorthodox beliefs even among the faithful, bewildering changes in liturgy and even theology, and, above all, the ever widening gap between the ideal and the actual in Christians life, mean not only that the clergy are bewildered and despondent about the contemporary situation of the church in society, but that they are, in so many cases, unsure of their institutional tasks. For sociologists to elaborate all this, and to offer no solutions, no remedies, no magic formulae (which clergy

especially still seem to expect from sociology) is to make matters worse, not better. 'Away with you, you sociologists: you are prophets who speak only vain babblings'.

One of the messages to emerge from Fichter's *apologia* is that he was able to undertake his surveys on the cheap. This he admitted was in part due to his being unmarried and willing to work long hours. Nevertheless, while he avoided the costly machinery inherent in professional work, he did have assistance from colleagues, frequently graduate students, and he was able to receive grants from non-Catholic organisations. By American standards the costs may have been low; but hardly so by European criteria. The point is that properly conducted surveys are expensive. If they happen not to be costly in money, they are costly in time. The Catholic Church has been fortunate in finding that her religious orders have been willing to establish research centres, that her priests (celibate and paid very little) have been ready to devote themselves to work in this fact-finding area. Other churches, smaller in size and lacking such resources, have found that the demands of survey work are extremely expensive and not worth the candle. But precisely at this point a moral issue arises. Should such expenditure of time and money be used for analysing the situation and collecting socio-religious data? The money could be better given to the Church and to the starving of the Third World, and men's time and energy could be more profitably devoted to building up parishes or helping the poor, the destitute, the lonely. Surveys are a luxury of an affluent (in terms of free labour and money) established church. But even here moral judgement is no less severe than on less fortunate churches. As a church becomes smaller, as resources diminish, not only is the moral predicament more acute, but the necessity of the moment dictates the outcome. If one may extend the argument, sects do not conduct surveys. Their finances scarcely admit the possibility: more importantly, from the point of view of mission work, they know the situation—99.9 per cent of a given town are not members of the Jehovah's Witnesses! There is no need of a survey to prove that!

What has been said about sociological research does not necessarily apply to work undertaken in universities for, say, M.A. or Ph.D. theses. Religious institutions in one way or another still form a popular topic, though in English academic circles there has been opposition to the purely descriptive thesis. For various reasons, some of which are apparent here, the Church makes little use of such findings. Nor do we refer to surveys of a very limited or amateurish kind instigated by parish priests themselves and undertaken by parishioners. Their purpose is educational, to stimulate interest and concern in the local church. Rather, the focus of attention here has been on surveys of professional standing, primarily fact-finding, but intended to have pastoral and practical value for the church in

strengthening its institutions. Is it too bold a claim to say that the hey-day of parish and diocesan surveys is over? The surveyors have done their work, they have found the facts, and all too successfully they have shattered the image. Today, if surveys are conducted, the results are not published either as books or as articles in learned journals. Thus, what goes on is kept for private consumption—as so many churchmen have always wanted, and as Fichter testifies. But Fichter also says that, compared with the early days, sociologists are now intellectually more respectable and ecclesiastically more useful. Briefly, we have tried to suggest that from within the British and even European experience, this is probably not so. Indeed, the final pages of his own book, where he makes a plea for sociological studies of peripheral church groups, seem to deny his general position. To this day sociologists do not have, and perhaps rightly so, an accepted place within the Church. If one examines churches which publish the names of those who have a place on their governing committees, very seldom if ever does one find someone who is a trained sociologist.

However, sociologists are still fascinated by religion, as is witnessed by the number of books they publish on the subject. Their contribution now tends to be of a different order than that of several years ago—it is more philosophical in outlook, more searching and more profound, and therefore less concerned with the details of the institution seen as an organisation. But how far the change of thinking can help the Church sustain its traditional structures remains extremely doubtful. Former hopes among a minority of an affair or even a marriage between the two have completely faded away. The relationship can only be clinical and one way, with the sociologist making what observations he pleases. Perhaps it is best that there be separation.