CHAPTER VI
SOCIOLOGICAL STUDIES ON PRIESTS

Christian priesthood, and particularly Roman Catholic priesthood, has attracted research scholars of religion the world over. Different branches of knowledge, such as theology and psychology have contributed to the subject. However, here the survey is confined to some pertinent sociological studies of empirical nature. While some of them focus specifically on priests, others consider the priest as part of enquiries on much broader themes. While some studies present comparative perspectives of priests of different Christian Churches, some others concentrate on priests of any one Church, for instance, the Roman Catholic Church. For convenience, the presentation here is divided into three sections - those on priests outside India, those that deal with priests in India, and thirdly, those that are specifically on priests in Kerala. In each case we shall move from general presentations on broader themes to specific studies on the Roman Catholic priesthood. And finally we shall refer to a few studies on priesthood in other religions.

1. Studies on Priests Outside India

Most commonly priests are seen in relation to parishes, and so several studies have examined the role of the priest in relation to parish structures. Gilbert Francis Wolters, in a doctoral research entitled, *A Socio-economic Analysis of Four Rural Parishes in Nemaha Country Kansas*, analyses the socio-economic climate of four Catholic parishes of America, consisting of German immigrants from North West Germany. In the dissertation, he lauds the role of the pastors of the parishes, "The prevailing religious spirit may be attributed in
greater part to the good example of the succession of hard-working pastors."\(^{290}\)

In *The Parish and Its Clergy*, Mulder traces the history of the gradual emergence of the structure of parishes in the Church: the growth from the structure of one church in a town, the bishop being its pastor, assisted by a number of priests, to full pledged parishes with priests having parochial rights.\(^{291}\)

In *The Sociology of the Parish: An Introductory Symposium*, the authors while discussing the organizational aspects and neighbourhood involvement of parishes, emphasize the preeminence of their spiritual purposes.\(^{292}\) *Priests and People*, a monographic study about St. Catherine’s Parish, Liverpool in the United Kingdom, by Conor K. Ward, finds that, "In such a community the part played by the priest is of the highest importance, even in the everyday lives of the parisioners and in relation to some at least of their problems. The priest, however, finds that calls on his time and competence are growing and more various and conflicting."\(^{293}\) In a study of the Church as an institution, David Moberg discusses the role of the leaders of different Churches, and sums up thus the joys and sorrows of the leaders of the Churches.

Prevented by social pressures from living as they believe men ought to live, frustrated by an unfulfillable self-image of the minister as one ordained to be a holy calling, filled with vocational guilt for spending major portions of time on pointless parish


piddling, disillusioned by the politics of professional advancement, embittered by the bureaucracy that makes them office managers, committee maneuverers, and publicity directors instead of scholars and preachers of God’s Word, sensing the double standard which expects the clergy and their families to live according to different ethical and moral standards from laymen, and sometimes sensing cleavages between doctrinal, social, political, or economic beliefs and what they are expected to preach, many ministers resolve their inner struggles by entering other vocations ... The ministry provides numerous satisfactions which are lacking in other vocations. Clergymen get more attention than many other occupational groups because they touch the lives of a substantial proportion of the nation’s people. The vast majority are well adjusted and happy in their service to God and man.  

In a survey, conducted in 1988, the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) measures the extent and direction of religious change in Ireland since its first schedule in 1991. One of the puzzles the survey finds is that of the low confidence in the ecclesiastical institution, but high confidence in local priests. “One doubts, however, that a people can really be called secularized when those between eighteen and twenty-eight, despite all the scandals, have such high regard for their local priests, and more than other cohorts see religion as important in shaping their moral decisions, feel very close to their Church, and such clear notions about their Catholic identity, especially the role of Mary in that identity.”

We now come to some specific studies on priests. In 1961 there have been two studies that approached priesthood as an occupation or profession.

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295Cf Doctrine and Life 50, 10 (December, 2000).

While in "Origins and Career Patterns of Leading Protestant Clergymen," Smith and Sjoberg focused on the Protestant clergyman,297 Joseph Fichter in *Religion as an Occupation*296 dealt with Catholic religious functionaries, primarily Catholic priests. Arthur X Deegan in *The Priest as Manager*, assuming that ultimately the priest has a leadership role in society, applies principles from the science of management to priesthood. "We are referring to the *leadership* role to be exercised by every priest in sharing the threefold role of the bishop - and of Christ ultimately - namely to teach, to sanctify and to serve, as he helps shape the lay person into the Christ witness which the latter must become."299

Gerald J. Dewey, towards the end of 1960's, made a study of the role-conflicts of priests after Vatican Council II. He challenges the tendency among sociologists to assume that human behaviour is exclusively social and only incidentally individual. His investigation is directed to the pastoral role of the Catholic priest. In his research he deals with role conception as a variable rather than a constant element in priestly behaviour. What seems evident to him at the end of his research is that varying personal conceptions of the pastoral role are discernible among priests, and that such differences refer to

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whether individual priests are primarily concerned with established normative arrangements, evolving role-demands, or both.\textsuperscript{300}

Koval has examined the evolution of clergy career and patterns in Catholic Church. He finds, “In the Church of yesterday a priest was a man for all seasons - a semi-professional handyman for a ghetto population that suspected ‘outsiders,’ and who resided in a ghetto where there were not enough professionals to meet social and personal needs. Now, increased specialization and professionalism (with a special emphasis in the social service sector) combined with the breakdown of the Catholic ghetto brought about the slow but sure encroachment on the manifold social functions of this man of all seasons.”\textsuperscript{301} While traditionally the role of the priest has been defined as that of teacher (rabbi), sanctifier (priest), and administrator-leader (minister), the new role definitions place an increased emphasis on the prophetic as contrasted to the teaching and priestly roles. “And prophetic, twentieth century style, does not mean beard, sandals, figs and wild honey, and ninety days in the desert. It refers to leadership, building a social consensus on moral imperatives and the ability to provide a sense of direction to men.”\textsuperscript{302}

In \textit{Evolving Religious Careers} we also find a study of the role of the characteristics of assignment of priests in the career experiences of Catholic


\textsuperscript{302}Ibid.
diocesan priests. The data are based on the questionnaire responses of 377 priests. The study concludes that for the largest segment of priests in the diocese of Hartford a vast quantity of human resource potential remains untapped due to the lack of the conditions necessary for successful career experiences through psychological success.\footnote{Benjamin Schneider and Douglas T. Hall, “The Role of Assignment Characteristics in the Career Experiences of Diocesan Priests,” Bartlett (ed.), Evolving Religious Careers, p. 131.}

In Clergy, Ministers and Priests, a group of three authors compare the role definitions of Anglican, Roman Catholic and Methodist clergy. The respondents are found to agree not only in ranking high their role as pastor (and father of the congregation), but also in their indifference and antipathy to their more organizational tasks. However, the authors draw our attention to the diversity among and within the Churches.\footnote{Stewart Ranson, Alan Bryan, and Bob Hinings, Clergy, Ministers and Priests (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), pp. 63-65.}

In The Professionalization and Professionalism of Catholic Priests, Hernan Vera makes a laudable attempt to analyze the occupational professionalization of Catholic priesthood, the professionalism that priests display, and the relation between the two.\footnote{Hernan Vera, The Professionalization and Professionalism of Catholic Priests (Florida: University Presses of Florida, 1982).} Vinko Potocnik surveys the questions and dilemmas posed for the mission of Catholic priests in the post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe. The author finds that despite lengthy attempts to discredit the priests or the Church during the Communist regime most inhabitants of the post-Communist countries assign them important roles, and expect much of them. The survey calls on priests neither to withdraw into the pre-Communist period...
nor simply to adopt the pattern of Western Christianity, but to pay attention to the expectations and needs of people locally, and discern.\textsuperscript{306}

Christian priesthood has been a topic of frequent studies and surveys in the United States of America. According to Osmund Schreuder, from 1930 to 1970 alone, the emerging social sciences produced 485 studies of clergy in the United States.\textsuperscript{307} They deal with wide ranging themes such as concerns over job commitment, satisfaction, stress, career patterns, progressional attitudes, education, and the like. Edward C. Lehman, in an article, "Correlates of Lay Perceptions of Clergy Ministry Style," presents both the convergence and divergence found in an exploratory study of the differences in how clergy serving Protestant Churches describe their ministry style in comparison to how their lay members perceive it.\textsuperscript{308} Using a 1994 survey of all clergy in Milwaukee Country, Sandi Brunette-Hill and Roger Finke update Samuel Blizzard's work on clergy time allocation, and extends it by going beyond the mainline Protestants to look at time allocation by sectarian Protestants and Catholic clergy, and by adding additional measures of time allocation. Their observations include not only a decline in the time the mainline Protestant clergy allotted to pastoral and administrative activities - interaction with church members, potential members


and religious and civic leaders, but also differences in time allocations among different Churches.\(^{309}\)

Using data from 156 Protestant Churches, Monahan examines how work arrangements in churches, organizational characteristics of churches, and clergy characteristics affect self-reported levels of role ambiguity among clergy. The author distinguishes between core-clergy work and administrative work. The former includes tasks central to the clergy role and ones for which clergy typically receive seminary training: priestly duties of worship practices, pastoral duties such as visiting families and counselling, educational duties including teaching religious classes, and evangelism, particularly preaching. Administrative work includes tasks related to the basic organizational functioning of churches (budgeting, fundraising, supervising employees). The survey finds fairly low levels of role ambiguity among priests. Role ambiguity was higher among clergy in hierarchical denominations, those with heavier tasks of task loads, and those who had been at the church for fewer years. It was reduced by a lighter task, a formalized job description, longer job tenure and specialized training for clergy.\(^{310}\)

Andrew Greeley is a Catholic priest and sociologist who has done several studies in sociology of religion, particularly on Catholic priests, in the United States of America. In *Persistence of Religion*, while examining Catholic


priesthood under the theme of religious leadership, he observes that the Roman Catholic priesthood was one of the most powerful religious leaderships in the world. Besides the cultic role performed by Catholic priests, Greeley notes the intellectual, social, political and moral leadership provided by them at various times and places. While arguing that the primary role of religious leadership is interpretive so much so that most important leadership positions take on a sacral or quasi-sacral dimension, he deprecates the tendency among priests to shy away from such a role. While admitting the vast variety in priestly activity, he concludes that "The priest's role, therefore, is to be what the role of the religious functionary has always been - to be God's man - to be the one others can 'turn to' for care and love." He elucidates that the priest is a man to "turn to" - to find playfulness, for concern over the community; as a man from whom respect for selfhood may be learnt; for hope in the future; for celebration because he is one who links the sacred and the profane; ultimately for love. According to him "(the priest) is going to be relevant in a real sense when he stops worrying about relevance and starts worrying about being - that is to say, being a man to whom others can turn, a man who whatever else he may do in society (and he may do very much) is still expected, more than anyone else, to transcend his

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313 Ibid., pp. 270-72.

314 Similar vision is shared by Pattison. "Thus the pastoral role is not so much a matter of what the pastor does, as what the pastor enables the system, operating in and through its subsystems, to accomplish. At stake is the question of who the pastor is." Cf. E. Mansell Pattison, *Pastor and Parish - A System Approach* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 50.
doing and to be for others.” The priest is primarily a “useless” man, a man who is expected not so much to do as to be.” In a recent study, he also discovers that Catholics give lower ratings to their clergy’s ministerial activities across the board than do the Protestants.

Three interrelated themes, popular in recent times in sociological studies and surveys about Christian Churches, and the Roman Catholic Church in particular, have been the phenomenon of the dwindling number of candidates to priesthood experienced already for long in the West, priestly celibacy, and ordination of women to priesthood. As surveys, more journalistic in nature, on these abound, we limit ourselves to a few recent ones that by way of samples point to the direction these take. To begin with the first theme, Lawrence A. Young and Richard A. Schoenherr, have been since 1988, seriously engaged in focusing on applying the tools of social demography to the study of clergy decline in the Catholic Church of the United States. They claim that in effect, they created a "vital statistics registration system" for the US Catholic clergy, collecting data on relevant vital events. In Full Pews and Empty Altars: Demographics of the Priest Shortage in United States Catholic Dioceses, they

315Greeley, A Future to Hope In: Socio-Religious Speculations, p. 274.
316Ibid., p. 263
317Andrew Greeley, “Rating the Clergy: Catholics gives Lower Ratings to their clergy's ministerial activities across the Board than do Protestants (Statistical Data included),” America (May 7, 2001).
319R. A. Schoenherr, and Lawrence Young, Full Pews and Empty Altars: Demographics of the Priest Shortage in United States Catholic Dioceses (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).
describe the demographic transition of the clergy for a period of 40 years, using empirical data for 19 years (1966-84) to make projections to the year 2005. In 1996, A. Young assesses the accuracy of the Schoenherr-Young projections. The rigorousness of the research is backed by their understanding of the centrality of priesthood in Catholic Church.

We have suggested throughout our work that priesthood is the linchpin that links structural elements in the Catholic Church. That is, while the priest shortage is an internal economic problem, representing a diocese's inability to select and retain sufficient professional resources from its ecological niche, this change in the organization's economy has important ramifications for the polity and the normative or cultural structure of the church and wider society. We posit that such a change in the organization's economy will lead to changes in the distribution of power, formation of coalitions, determination of goals, and other political processes in the Catholic Church. Consequently, the analysis of continuity and change in contemporary Roman Catholicism begins with a demographic assessment of the priest supply. Providing that demographic assessment has been the primary focus of the Schoenherr-Young projections. Since our analysis demonstrated a more or less inevitable continuation of the decline in the priesthood population, we have argued that looming behind our projections is a fundamental transformation in the structural elements of the Catholic Church. For example, Roman Catholicism is indisputably a sacramental Church. Yet we have repeatedly pointed out that because of the looming priest shortage, in order to guarantee this generation of church members its baptismal right of access to the sacraments, policies concerning mandatory celibacy and the ordination of women must be changed.320

In a recent study, Vilarino notes important differences in the consequences of the demographic transition in Spain and in the United States of America. While in the United States, the gender question and celibacy rule have received major momentum, in Spain declericalization is seen as a more

key dimension. But he recognizes that “The priest’s position in the church is so central that changing his professional role will bring a deep change in the power structure as well as in theology. In our opinion, there will still be a rather long period of ambiguity in the priestly role.” According to Stark and Finke, the collapse in the number of candidates to Catholic priesthood was self-imposed, not merely incidental to the process of modernity. It is the negative cost/benefit ratio that dissuade the young from taking up priestly life.

Keep in mind that we do not propose that the Catholic Church ought to retain its reliance on costly religious vocations on a church staffed by a corps of what Max Weber called religious virtuosoi. Centuries of Protestant experience demonstrate the adequacy of less costly vocations. But, what we do propose is that to generate and sustain religious virtuosoi requires constant reinforcement from an equally committed community of peers, firm belief in divine appreciation of the relevant sacrifices, and special levels of worldly recognition of virtue.

Drawing on theories of motivational leadership from the business management literature, Andrew Yuengert finds the role of the bishop of the diocese a significant variable in fostering applicants.

A contentious area of study that has increasingly received frequent attention is clerical celibacy. Don Swenson by means of a study concludes

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324 Clerical celibacy popularly denotes the state of not being married. Its advocates trace its origin to biblical sources (Mt 19: 10-12; Lk 5:11). However, history attests that while till the third century, bishops and priests were mostly married men, by the fourth century, due to the result of the growing awareness of a close bond between priesthood and celibacy, the unmarried clergy became the majority, and ordained ministers were forbidden to enter the married state. Though
that there are no significant differences in dimensions of religiosity and parochial commitment between celibate priests and married clergy. Though the former spend longer periods of time in prayer than the latter, the longer prayer is not found to be of serious consequences to experiential religiosity. \[325\] Patricia M.Y. Chang and Paul Pearl, in a study among male and female clergy from sixteen Protestant denominations in the United States examine the effects of marital status on the earnings of Protestant clergy, paying particular attention to how even then celibacy was not imposed as a rule, continence in marriage was gradually required from the married clergy of the Western Church. In the sixth century continence became a clear obligation for the clergy of the Western Church. However, it was the Council of Pisa (1135) that declared that marriage contracted by clergy was not valid. Up to the Council of Trent (1545 - 1563), it was usual to ordain married men. In the later times, it has been reaffirmed that though there is no bond of necessity between ministry and celibacy, as is made clear by the practice of the Eastern Church, there exists nevertheless a clear harmony between the two which recommends that the long tradition of the Western Church be preserved. "For these reasons, based on the mystery of Christ and his mission, celibacy, which at first was recommended to priests, was afterwards in the Latin Church imposed by law on all who were to be promoted to holy Orders. This sacred Council approves and confirms this legislation so far as it concerns those destined for the priesthood ..." (PO 16). Cf. J. Neuner and J. Dupuis (eds), The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church, 5th rev. edn. (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1991), p. 560. It is being argued for as a return to an old tradition of the Church than an innovation. Cf. Gerard S. Sloyan, "The Return of an old Tradition : The Western church is not only prepared for a married clergy; it already has one," America (April 15, 2000). In the wake of the challenges raised in the context of the acceptance of married pastors of non-Roman Catholic communities into priesthood in the Catholic Church, Francis T. Hurley, the Archbishop of Anchorage, Alaska, since 1976, asserts that the mandate of celibacy in the Latin Church has two strong attractions. It is an element in the identity of the priest in the Latin Church, and it is also a sign of the charism of the diocesan priest. Cf. Francis T. Hurley, "The return to ministry of inactive married priests: if there is a place for a former Protestant minister who is married... is there one for the inactive married Catholic priest?" America (Feb 28, 1998). It is with money and power that Arthur Jones ties the issue of celibacy in the Church. "Enough to make one realize also that the whole issue of clerical celibacy is nothing more than a power play with incense for the smoke, as in smoke and mirrors." Cf. Arthur Jones, "Celibacy's history of power and money. (Perspectives). (Catholic Church)," National Catholic Reporter (April 12, 2002) <http://www.findarticles.com/>. Greeley, following Professor Anson Shupe, affirms that wherever there is asymmetry of power, there is likely to be abuse. But he concludes that "Celibacy does not cause child abuse. Most abusers are married men. Most priests do not abuse the power they have over children." Cf. Andrew M. Greeley, "How Prevalent is Clerical Sexual Abuse?" Doctrine and Life 50, 2 (February, 2000), p. 67. The topic has come under intense debate in the context of sexual misconduct that has rocked the Church, particularly in the United States. While empirical verification of the allegations is on, the ecclesiastical authorities at the national and the world levels, are contemplating appropriate measures to tackle the crisis.

gender mediates the effects of marriage and divorce. They conclude that married male clergy earn roughly 20 percent more than their single counterparts because of the desirability of marriage as a character trait for men. In the case of women, gender is a more important characteristic than marital status in determining earnings. Men benefit from marriage in addition to their gender.  

In a synod of the Montreal Archdiocese, held on Nov. 29 and 30, 1998, and participated in by more than 600 delegates, both lay and clergy, mostly elected by parishes and pastoral regions, the resolution for ordaining married men was passed with 74 percent, while 66.33 percent supported ordination of women priests. According to Campion, the demand of celibacy is not the major reason for the shortage of priests because it is an experience of Roman Catholicism that retains priestly celibacy, and of other Christian Churches such as the Anglicans, the Lutherans and the Presbyterians that do not demand priestly celibacy. Instead he points to changes in Western culture. Probably even more potent has been the cry for women priesthood. Paul Sullins in a


328 Owen F. Campion, "Vocations and Culture," The Priest 57, 7 (July, 2001), pp. 384.

329 John Wijngaards, while sketching the history of the cause for women priesthood, finds St. Joan's International Alliance in England (1911) as its early champions. According to him, the exclusion of women from ordination became a pronounced issue in 1928. Cf. Ed. John Wijngaards, The Ordination of Women in the Catholic Church: Unmasking a Cuckoo's Egg Tradition (Delhi: Media House, 2002), pp. 26–8. Pope John Paul II, taking into consideration the contemporary debate on women priesthood, taught definitively in an apostolic letter, Ordinatio Sacerdotalis (May 22, 1994) that "Wherefore, in order that all doubt may be removed regarding
study among priests in the Episcopal church in 1999 has examined career
gender inequality in status of position. The study finds that despite formal
acceptance, women clergy have faced subordination in practice in many
Protestant denominations. The author locates the cause of the unchanging
resistance not in formal institutional discrimination, i.e., decisions of the church
hierarchy or other clergy but entirely in embedded cultural values, values that
are particularly resident in congregations and that show no indication of
changing.

2. Studies On Priests in India

Unlike in the West where there are several studies on Church leaders,
few sociologists in India have taken sufficient note of the density of Church
leaders, particularly of Catholic priests in the country. Blaise Coelho in his
doctoral dissertation published as The Parish as an Organization: A Study of an

\[\text{a matter of great importance, a matter which pertains to the Church's divine constitution itself, in}
\text{virtue of my ministry of confirming the brethren (cf. Lk 22:32) I declare that the Church has no}
\text{authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be}
\text{definitively held by all the Church's faithful} \text{(art. 4). Wijngaards, differing from the declaration of}
\text{Pope John Paul II, maintains that "the ban against women priests inflicts serious damage on the}
\text{Catholic community. Cf. Wijngaards, p. 182. James Kottoor, an invitee from India to the First}
\text{International Conference on Women's Ordination Worldwide, held in Dublin from June 28 to July}
\text{2001, has presented the basic lessons as well as clear pointers to various puzzling questions on}
\text{the subject, which according to him, is strongly discouraged and hotly debated in the Roman}
\text{Catholic Church. Cf. James Kottoor, Woman Why are you Weeping? A Discussion on Women's}
\text{Ordination in the Roman Catholic Church in the Context of WOW 2001 Dublin (Delhi: Media}
\text{House, 2002).}

\[\text{33}0\text{Although some well-publicized ordinations of women, later regularized, occurred in}
\text{protest to canons prohibiting them as early as 1974, ordination of women in the Episcopal church}
\text{did not begin officially, nor in significant numbers, until 1977.}

\[\text{33}1\text{Paul Sullins. "The Stained Glass Ceiling: Career Attainment for Women Clergy,"}
\text{Sociology of Religion (Fall, 2000), pp. 243-66.}
Urban Parish Besides upholds that in an urban context, it is better to treat parishes as organizations rather than as communities.332

Most of the studies done have been primarily oriented to the improvement of the training of priests. As preparation for a synod of Roman Catholic bishops in October 1971 in Rome, on the theme of ministerial priesthood, the clergy commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India conducted a survey among Catholic priests of India. The important areas of enquiry were crisis of priests in India, theological understanding of priesthood, desirability of priestly celibacy and the relationship between the bishop and the priests. The survey brings out that the cultic image of the priest in his sociological distance from the laity, the prophetic mission, and the vocation to service are often not seen sufficiently.333

Paul V. Parathazham, under the auspices of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (C.B.C.I.), undertook a national survey on Catholic priests, during the period extending from 1985 to 1987.334 The major concerns of the study were expectations about priests, perceptions of priests, and some debated issues such as priestly celibacy and priests contesting in elections. Its over-all perspective was intra-communitarian, and preparation of a new charter of


334Paul Parathazham, Priests in Perspective (Pune: Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, 1987).

priestly formation was its context. In a study entitled, *Priestly Formation in the Changing Society of India*, Matthew M Vallipalam\(^{335}\) has discussed the seminary training of Catholic priests in India. As the most recent publication, *The Christian Clergy in India* by T.K. Oommen and Hunter P. Mabry deserves special mention. This nation-wide study, initiated in 1978, with a view to improve the theological education in the Protestant theological colleges in India, focuses on students of 14 theological colleges, 12 of which were affiliated to Serampore College.\(^{336}\) It is marked by a national orientation and focus on non-Catholic clergy.

The pivotal position of priests in Churches often make them part of most studies about Churches. For instance, the role of priests and religious formed part of a survey the Archdiocese of Delhi conducted. According to the survey, priests and religious on the whole favour priests gradually withdrawing from non-clerical works and professions and allowing lay people to take charge of these. But the lay-respondents are evenly divided in their opinion. The stronger view however is that priests should be involved only in pastoral and spiritual ministries.\(^{337}\) On the occasion of the celebration of the second millennium of the

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birth of Jesus Christ, another evaluation was done at the initiative of the National Committee for Yesu Krist Jayanti 2000.338

3. Studies On Priests in Kerala

Though several aspects of the Church in Kerala have attracted sociologists, sociological literature has more generic than specific references to priests. As part of a research programme of the Centre for Socio-Religious Research of the Catholic University of Louvain, towards the analysis of the social functions of religion in different modes of production, Lemercinier, in *Religion and Ideology in Kerala*, studies the social function religion performs in Kerala, a mode of pre-capitalist production. Therein the author observes that in the midst of plurality not only of religions but also in religions, the society of Kerala is marked with co-existence, without conflict, of different religious groups; with the relationship between religious-belonging and social-belonging of castes and ethnic groups; and with the importance of the religious factor as a component of the culture of each of these groups. He examines the hypotheses that, in Kerala, while religions in their variety have performed the function of providing social identity to their followers, it was not any one all-inclusive ideology that integrated all the social groups and reduced them totally to unity.339

It is opportune here to recall that after presenting the statistical data about the many educational institutions that the Catholic Syrians had in 1911,


Lemercinier comments that, "These were all founded by the clergy, who exercised the main leadership in the group and enjoyed a monopoly of such initiatives." While mentioning about the objection that the Syrian Catholics as well as the Latin Catholics of the rising middle class raised with regard to the admission of the sons of the fisherfolk belonging to the Latin rite to seminaries, the author observes that, "Access to the priesthood was clearly a powerful symbol of a rise in the social scale. Some groups among the Catholics tried to obtain a monopoly of this access, while others, like the fisherfolk for instance, saw in it an expression of collective promotion for the group."

In three separate works Francois Houtart and G. Lemercinier have discussed the development of Christianity in India. While the first focuses on Kerala, the other two have a national orientation. In *Church and Development in Kerala* the authors identify two basic attitudes - a firm and coherent aspiration for individual liberty, and building up of an egalitarian society - among Catholic diocesan priests of Kerala. George Koilparampil has made a commendable study of the relation between the Latin and the Syrian Catholic communities in

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340 Ibid., p. 224.

341 Ibid.


343 Francois Houtart and G. Lemercinier, *Church and Development in Kerala*, p. 236.
Jose Kuriedath has made a study on the evolution of the authority structures in the Syro-Malabar Catholic community. Some of his pertinent observations are, i) The leadership style of the parish priest is second only to the interest groups in influencing decision making, ii) the influential power of parish priests is primarily on account of the office, iii) the influential power of the parish priests is fast declining.

In his work, *Church and Society in Kerala*, Antony Kariyil challenges in the context of Kerala the Weberian thesis that Christian communities other than the Catholic have contributed more to the economic development of peoples. The author while evidencing the political involvement of the Church leadership (Bishops and priests) reports that majority of his respondents hold the involvement as reasonable. On the basis of the Communist identification of the clergy, he also groups them into three - the conservative group, the radical group, and the marginal group. In a recent study conducted in Anandhapuram, a village in the district of Alappuzha in Kerala, the authors evaluate thus the role of priests. The vicar of the parish has exercised his leadership in the different developmental programmes of the village. There is one charismatic leader who has taken a lead role in the developmental activities.

344 George Koilparampil, *Caste in the Catholic Community in Kerala* (Cochin: St. Teresa's College, 1982).


347 Ibid., p. 113.

348 Ibid., pp. 144-157.
Both these leaders hail from the majority community and their leadership role is complementary. Communities other than the majority community had always accepted their leadership and cooperated with them.\textsuperscript{349}

While the studies mentioned above have indirect references to Catholic priests in Kerala, there have been a few sociological studies on the subject itself. In a study entitled \textit{Dropouts}, George Koilparampil has analysed the psycho-social problems of the young men who discontinue priestly training in seminaries. This study is made in the theoretical framework of the "Labelling Theory." The conclusions deplore the unhealthy attitude of the society towards these dropouts.\textsuperscript{350} There have been two studies about the numerical trends and significance of candidates to priesthood in and from Kerala.\textsuperscript{351} Besides the statistical data, \textit{Vocations in India} portrays the Malpanite system that existed among the St. Thomas Christians. \textit{Malpan} means learned, erudite etc. Malpans were secular priests of the St. Thomas Christian community. The office of the Malpans was hereditary, from uncle to nephew. The Malpanite is a system of formation for the candidates to priesthood. It had many similarities with the \textit{Gurukulavasam}.\textsuperscript{352} Indicating the high status that they had in the community,

\textsuperscript{349}Choorapoikayil Jose, Kumminiyil Jacob, James Robert, and E.J. Thomas, "Integrating and Disintegrating Variables in a Nuclear Community," \textit{Loyola Journal of Social Sciences}, XXII, 2, p. 124.

\textsuperscript{350}George Koilparampil, \textit{Dropouts: An Analysis of the Psycho-social Problems of the Dropouts from Priestly Training} (Trivandrum: Department of Social Science Research, Loyola College, 1974.)

\textsuperscript{351}Alex Paul Urumpackal, \textit{Vocations in India} (Vadavathoor, Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, 1988)

Jose Kuniedath, \textit{Vocations in Kerala} (Thevara, Kochi: Sacred Heart College, 1997).

\textsuperscript{352}It is a Malayalam word which means living together with the teacher.
the author finds also the reasons for the same. Vocations in Kerala studies the social determinants of vocations in Kerala. Kuriedath points out that the high esteem for priests was one of the reasons for their abundance. The author admits that in the institutionalized Church priests had to exercise several functions which they did not perform in the early Church. He mentions about the dwindling of the authority of priests in society.

In 1980-81 Paul Parathazham conducted a survey entitled, Catholic Priesthood in Kerala: A Sociological Investigation, in which he has examined the attitude of Kerala clergy to priesthood. The important aspects studied therein were the opinion of the clergy on selected theological and moral questions as well as on the post-Vatican II changes in the Church; experience in ministry; level and sources of job-satisfaction and frustration; and perceptions of the status of the Kerala Church. Some of its important aspects were permanence of the priestly commitment, difference between ministerial priesthood and the priesthood of the laity, role-uncertainty among priests, and linkage between celibacy and priesthood.

353 Urumpackal, Vocations in India, pp. 262-75.
354 Kuriedath, Vocations in Kerala, p. 9.
4. Studies On Priests of Other World Religions

The dearth of sociological researches on priests is not confined only to Christian or Catholic priests. While not at all claiming to be exhaustive, we present here a few recent studies that directly or indirectly deal with priests in religions other than Christianity.

Yoshiharu Tomatsu presents a view of the secularization of modern Japanese Buddhism in concrete and meaningful terms by looking at the Buddhist priest, his status and the attitudes towards him. He employs secularization to denote the absorption of certain aspects of the Buddhist priest into everyday, profane social interaction, and marginalization to refer to the movement of certain aspects of the Buddhist priest away from the centres to the margins of social interaction. He describes the various steps by which the Buddhist priests gradually got secularized: the stage of unauthorised monks, i.e. those who had dropped out of their temples or had actually never been ordained; the abandonment of priestly celibacy; the promulgation of an edict by which monks under the state law were allowed to eat meat, to marry, to grow hair, to take on a family name, and to not wear robes except at services. The state began to view Buddhist monks as common people; in fact during the World War II, they were drafted into the military as foot soldiers. The author describes how the priests have taken advantage of the high regard the Japanese have for ancestors, and made funeral services very expensive and lucrative. Gradually priests have been fully transformed into lay men, and have increasingly become nothing more than actors on a sacred stage, viewed for a moment as possessors
of holy power, and nearly despised at other times. "More and more the priest as a person is being absorbed into secular society, and his role as sacred representative of Buddhism being pushed out of the mainstream of society."

C.J. Fuller, in a research among the priests of the Minaksi temple in Madurai (Tamil Nadu), studies the relation between religious texts and ritual action. He finds that while education improves the recitation of texts during rituals, it has no impact on physical ritual, which largely depends on 'techniques of the body' acquired through practice. The scholar holds that in the Hindu ritual world the quality of the performance of rituals also is considered. "... ritual as conceptualised by priests is preoccupied with the fact that they and their colleagues are all likely 'to get it wrong' ..." According to Humphrey and Laidlaw, the identity of a ritualized act does not depend, as is the case with normal action, on the agent's intention in acting.

S. Selvam detects the beginnings of secularisation in the social organization of Kumbeswarar temple, a major Saivite Hindu temple of Kumbakonam, in Thanjavur district (Tamil Nadu). He notes the replacement of patrimonial administration by a modern bureaucracy, headed by an executive officer. He reports that the occupation of priests, though hereditary still, is

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undergoing certain changes, and that their traditional privileges, associated with priesthood as a sacred profession, are being rapidly eroded. Certain service conditions such as educational qualification and Agamic training are being stressed. Service-registers are being kept, and a system of paying monthly salary is being introduced. The executive officer is authorised to take disciplinary action against any priest for misconduct or misappropriation of materials issued to him for the purposes of the temple. Also notable is that the aspirations of Adisaivas for jobs outside the temple with reasonably good salaries are rising. Priests’ membership in trade unions indicates the extent of secularization among the Adisaiva priests.360

Ali Köse, based on interviews with a sample of native British converts to Islam, identifies the major factors involved in their conversions. According to the respondents, the major reason for their change over is oversecularization of Christianity. The interviews reveal that these had never really adapted to the institutional Church. But their adoption of Islam is not a move against the sacred or the spiritual.

They desired a less secular and materialistic way of life. It is clear that their conversions were not about leaving (nominal) Christianity for Islam but were about an increasing tendency towards the sacred and the spiritual. Their view was that Christianity had lost its spiritual capacity to lead people in a secular environment. They criticized Christian churches for making too many compromises to the demands of modern life.361


Edwin A. Ahirika has made a comparative study of priesthood in Israelite\textsuperscript{362} and Igbo religions. He refers also to priesthood in Ancient Mesopotamia and in Egypt. He underscores that in Judaism and Igbo religions, priests are important functionaries in the socio-religio activities. He finds striking similarities in their priesthood and concept of mediation.\textsuperscript{363}

While it is needless to say that these studies enrich our endeavour greatly, some of these have explicitly called for further study of the priests. Vallipalam towards the end of his study says, “The professional role of the priest is changing in India as a result of the change in society. But the one change has not kept pace with the other; hence the need for further reflection on the priestly role in the changing society of India.”\textsuperscript{364} T.K. Oommen and Hunter P. Mabry, conclude the general introduction to their recent work with the following wish. “It is our hope that the publication of these volumes will stimulate such further enquiry and help create a deeper and more widespread concern for the formation of Christian clergy and the ministry of the Church in India.”\textsuperscript{365} The observations of Kuriedath with regard to the dwindling influence of parish priests in society certainly leave room for further enquiry.

\textsuperscript{362}For discussion on the concept of priesthood in Judaism, Cf. p. 38.


\textsuperscript{364}Vallipalam. Priestly Formation in the Changing Society of India, p. 288.

Chapters seven to nine contain the empirical segment of this study. Chapter seven presents the methodology adopted in carrying out the empirical exploration. It includes a discussion of the objectives, the hypotheses, the operationalization of terms, the sampling technique, the socio-economic constitution of the samples, and the tools of data collection. Chapters eight and nine are dedicated to analysis and interpretation of the empirical data. Chapter eight elaborates on the Role Played by Catholic priests in Kerala during the period 1991 to 2000. Chapter nine discusses the role of Catholic priests in Kerala in the Future, and offers comparative perspectives between the Past and the Future. Taking into consideration the diversity and complexity of the subject, the role of priests has been studied and presented chiefly under fourteen Areas of Work. In the eighth and the ninth chapters, the total perspective is discussed first, and later the more particular. It is mainly these that have been presented with the help of tables. Comparison between Sample A (the priests) and Sample B (the laity) is made as each theme evolves. The significance of other socio-economic variables has been analyzed towards the end of chapters eight and nine. The data are throughout presented under broader perspectives, with particular reference to the Syro-Malabar Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly, and the Latin Archdiocese of Verapoly, where the researcher undertook the field work.