

SECRECY IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.
THE CASE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL STATISTICS IN ENGLAND
AND WALES

Anthony E.C.W. Spencer

A Pastoral Research Centre Paper

Secrecy in the Catholic Church. The case of Catholic school statistics in England and Wales

Anthony E.C.W. Spencer

Copyright © by Anthony E.C.W. Spencer, 2010

Published by Russell-Spencer Ltd., Stone House, Hele, Taunton, Somerset TA4 1AJ, England
sociorelresearch@btinternet.com

The right of Anthony Spencer to be identified as the author of this paper has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

The views expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of the Trustees of the Pastoral Research Centre Trust

ISBN 978-1-905270-52-1

CONTENTS

	Page
I. Secrecy as the eighth sacrament	4
II. Theological and philosophical origins of secrecy in the Church	4
III. The extension of Church secrecy to ecclesiastical statistics	5
(a) Financial statistics	6
(b) Pastoral and population statistics	6
(c) Catholic school statistics	7
(d) Recent developments	8
(e) In conclusion	8
IV. Access to diocesan archives	9
V. Accountability and secrecy	11
VI. Secrecy and the current worldwide paedophilia crisis	12
VII. Secrecy in civil society	13
VIII. The consequences of secrecy for the Church	13
IX. Statistical secrecy about Catholic schools. The saga of the Catholic Education Service	14
References	18
 Appendix	
The eighth sacrament of the Church: secrecy. The case of Catholic school statistics	
(a) The penalties for statistical ignorance & the rewards for good statistics	19
(b) Rationalisation and reorganisation	19
(c) The consequences of statistical secrecy	20
(d) Manifestations of secrecy	20
(e) Why the secrecy?	21
(f) Figures from the hat	22
Information Commission letter dated 23 November, 2007 (<i>Not now included</i>)	
Report 1. Summary of pupils by sex, religion and school type (<i>Not now included</i>)	
A critical appraisal of the CES <i>Digest of 2008 Census Data for Schools and Colleges.</i>	23

I. SECRECY AS THE EIGHTH SACRAMENT

In a paper read at a Pastoral Research Centre (PRC) conference in May, 1965, the late Mgr John Barry, Rector of St Andrews College, Drygrange, remarked on “the ancient ecclesiastical attitude which can best be described as the eighth sacrament – secrecy”. He went on to observe that “in the Church the sacrament of secrecy is employed at all levels – between Holy See and bishops (at least before Vatican II), between bishops and priests, priests and people, parish priests and curates.” (Quoted in Spencer, 2008).

The purpose of this paper is to address one particular aspect of ecclesiastical secrecy in England and Wales today, the refusal of the Catholic Education Service (CES) to publish the statistics of Catholic schools, their pupils and teachers which it collected, edited and tabulated in the years 1992 to 2006, and to allow academics access to its statistical archives. Part IX of this paper describes the attempts that have been made – with some success – to end the statistical secrecy at the CES since the publication of the 1991 statistics that had been collected by its predecessor, the Catholic Education Council (CEC). The unpublished paper drafted in 2008 in response to the continuing secrecy is set out in its original form as an appendix to this present paper.

However, this paper seeks to situate the statistical secrecy of the CES in the wider context of secrecy in the Church. In Part II it examines, very briefly, the theological origins of secrecy, and the conclusions on truth and secrecy of Vatican II. In Part III it examines the extension of secrecy to ecclesiastical statistics, with specific reference to three examples: financial statistics, pastoral statistics and statistics of Catholic schools. Part IV focuses on secrecy and openness in diocesan archives, using the preliminary results of a separate on-going study. In Part V the relationship between secrecy and the current worldwide paedophilia crisis is briefly examined. Part VI considers accountability in relation to secrecy. Part VII examines some current issues in civil society in relation to secrecy. Part VIII considers in general terms the consequences of secrecy for the Church that proclaimed at Vatican II its determination to engage with the modern world. Finally, in Part IX the paper returns to its central issue of statistical secrecy at the CES since 1991.

II. THEOLOGICAL & PHILOSOPHICAL ORIGINS OF SECRECY IN THE CHURCH

Over two millennia much has been written about the theological origins of secrecy in the Church, and about the moral theology of truth and various forms of untruth. The following sketch uses Davis’s *Moral and Pastoral Theology* (1938 edition) concluding with the documents of Vatican II. It does not review the literature of the forty-five year retreat from Vatican II. In Augustinian terms the College of Bishops at Vatican II prayed: “Lord, make us virtuous”, while in the years that followed the Roman Curia added “but not yet.”

Davis (410-426) considered secrecy as related to the eighth commandment, and telling lies. In his exposition secrecy is enjoined between individuals, driven by charity and justice. The word ‘statistics’ does not appear in the index to Davis’ four volume study. Davis had practically nothing to say about truth or the moral quality of concealing the truth.

The literature is extraordinarily silent about the suppression of the truth, other than uncharitable and unjust suppression of the truth about individuals. Put another way, any notion of a **right** to the truth is not discernible in this literature. And there is no hint of the common good requiring disclosure of the truth.

However, from 1946 there was increasing discussion in the media of the natural right to be informed. Some of it was cited in my paper on “The publication of ecclesiastical statistics” (Spencer, 2008: 1-2). This led up to John XXIII’s *Pacem in Terris* in 1963. He argued (Art. 12) that man “has a right to freedom in investigating the truth, and – within the limits of the moral order and the common

good – to freedom of speech and publication....He has the right also to be accurately informed about public events.”

When considering duties in *Pacem in Terris* (Art 9) he observed that “the right to be free to seek out the truth” involved “the duty to devote oneself to an ever deeper and wider search for it.” He added (35) that “...before a society can be considered well-ordered, creative, and consonant with human dignity, it must be based on truth.”

Nine days after the opening of Vatican II the Council Fathers endorsed and issued a “Message to Humanity” that Pope John XXIII had himself sent to them for discussion. “... While we hope that the light of faith will shine more clearly and more vigorously as a result of this Council’s efforts, we look forward to a happy impulse on behalf of human values such as scientific discovery, technological advances, and a wider diffusion of knowledge.”

Vatican II’s “Decree on the Instruments of Social Communication” (5) argues that “there exists within human society a right to information about affairs that affect men individually and collectively....The proper exercise of this right demands that the matter communicated always be true, and as complete as charity and justice allow.”

This decree stresses that “civil society is bound by special duties in terms of the moral good....This authority is duty bound to defend and protect a true and just availability of information; the progress of modern society utterly depends on this, especially as regards freedom of the press.” (Art.12)

The foundation document of Vatican II was *Lumen Gentium*, the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*. It has nothing to say about ecclesiastical statistics. Indeed, the word ‘statistics’ does not appear in the index to Abbott’s *Documents of Vatican II*. But *Lumen Gentium* has one much-quoted Article (37) which explains what I was trying to do in the paper I prepared for the journal *Networking*, and what I am doing now: “An individual layman, by reason of the knowledge, competence, or outstanding ability which he may enjoy, is permitted and sometimes even obliged to express his opinion on things which concern the good of the Church. Let it always be done in truth, in courage, and in prudence....”

III. THE EXTENSION OF CHURCH SECRECY TO ECCLESIASTICAL STATISTICS

Generations of moral theologians considered truth and untruth almost exclusively as relating to individuals, and did so as issues of charity and justice, i.e. they focused on the particular rather than the universal.

However, by definition statistics are universalistic, not particularistic. They do not consider Jack and Jill as particular individuals; they consider aspects, features or characteristics of thousands, or millions of Jacks and Jills. There is a hint of this in Davis (424) when he wrote: “Where a secret of great moment is held under promise to keep it at the risk of life, probably so serious an obligation is null from the beginning. It is not intended to include secrets of State nor war secrets, for then the common good may require life itself to be sacrificed.” Davis took it for granted that in wartime the safety of the collectivity gave the State the moral right to impose extreme conditions of secrecy, and extreme penalties for disclosing secrets. The extraordinary success of the code-breaking at Bletchley Park, probably saving millions of lives, depended on the equally extraordinary willingness of the thousands who worked there to keep their mouths shut. But Davis’ exclusive focus on individuals meant that he never considered the damage done to the collectivity when an individual or an institution insists on keeping secret information whose disclosure is required for the common good.

I know of no comprehensive history of statistics in the Catholic Church (cf Spencer, 1967). And I know of no history of statistics of the Catholic Church in England & Wales, though I included a sketch in *Facts and Figures* (Spencer, 2006: 25-34). I cannot therefore give an account of the extension

of the Catholic moral theology of secrecy from its original concern with charity and justice for individuals to its contemporary threat to the common good of the Catholic community and society at large. It may, however, be useful to review recent developments illustrating the impact of secrecy on the use of ecclesiastical statistics.

Financial statistics

In addition to a workforce all institutions need financial resources, and it is in this field that Catholic institutions have for centuries been most secretive. The Churches of the Reformation – Protestant and Anglican – have a history of financial accountability, in contrast to the secrecy of Catholic financial statistics at parish, diocesan, national and international levels.

In the 1960s the PRC devoted a great deal of time and attention to gathering together whatever accounts it could. At parish level we found that a tiny minority of parishes provided parishioners with an annual account of incomings and outgoings. They were all very different in their arrangement and detail. Eventually we were able to prepare national estimates of income and expenditure at parish level for the year 1964. They were not published as the PRC had to re-locate to Belfast. Forty years later they are still in the publication queue.

At diocesan level we were able to gather some of the lists published by dioceses showing how much each parish contributed to special collections authorised by the Ordinary, and the annual accounts of some diocesan institutions, like Children's Societies. The accounts of the dioceses themselves remained secret. At national level we were able to get figures for a few national bodies, but no more.

This remained the situation until the Charity Commission first required dioceses to submit accounts and then started to publish them on its website. Over a few years diocesan accounts moved from total secrecy to complete public disclosure. And the heavens did not fall in. This openness is now taken completely for granted by the Catholic community, the media and the general public, insofar as they are even aware of it. And many dioceses publish summaries of their accounts in their diocesan directories. I have to add that apart from the PRC (Spencer, 2007: 127-140) I cannot call to mind any systematic analyses or commentaries on these accounts, though limited references to them have appeared in the Catholic press. But these figures on the Charity Commission website have focused attention on specific problems in a number of dioceses (Spencer, 2006: 42).

Pastoral and population statistics

The first occasion when pastoral statistics were collected by all dioceses in England and Wales was, I believe, in 1866 when dioceses responded to a Hierarchy decision to collect from parishes baptismal and marriage statistics for each of the sixteen years 1850 to 1865 (Spencer, 2006b). Individual dioceses continued to collect them annually until an attempt was made at rationalisation in 1911-12 (Spencer, 2006: 25). The new figures were first published in the 1913 edition of the *Catholic Directory*, but there was back-tracking over deaths/burials, and incomplete cooperation. More important, every diocese used its own design of form, and a minority did not even collect figures for the calendar year. These most unsatisfactory arrangements continued until World War II, when the system came close to collapse.

Towards the end of the war Butler introduced his Education Bill. He warned Archbishop Downey in 1943 that “what Parliament will ask for are facts and figures” (Spencer, 2006: 35). Parliament did not get ‘facts and figures’ from the Hierarchy: the figures published during the war in the *Catholic Directory* can only be described as rubbish. The 1944 Education Act placed a crippling burden on the Catholic community, and with the war ended the Catholic community found it extremely difficult to re-build and repair their schools and bring them up to a reasonable standard. For two

decades Catholic schooling was greatly impoverished, and for large numbers of Catholic children there was no place in a Catholic school.

The very able and energetic Augustinian Bishop Andrew Beck had already been recognised as an educational expert when in 1948 he was appointed Coadjutor Bishop of Brentwood. In articles in *The Tablet* in 1947 and 1948 (Spencer, 2006: 35-37) he struggled to use the lamentable Catholic statistics to understand the Catholic schools crisis. But it seems that he did nothing to rationalise the Church's pastoral and population statistics system. This rationalisation started in 1954 when a NDS study of the meaning and content of the Church's statistics revealed how unsatisfactory they were. The first stage of the rationalisation was the adoption of a common pastoral statistics form (with notes) for use (ultimately) in all dioceses, and the adoption of the calendar year as the period for which statistics were to be collected in all dioceses.

This first stage was implemented by dioceses at different dates, so that some used the new form to collect their figures for 1955, others for 1956, 1957 and 1958. Not until 1963 did Westminster collect statistics of deaths. The second stage involved a common centralised system for the final edit of the parish returns and their tabulation. This started in 1959 and was completed by 1963.

As a result of this two-stage rationalisation detailed statistics became available for 1958 and all subsequent years up to 1991. The figures were not published but those for 1958 to 1962 were widely circulated. Those for the years 1963 to 1991 were sent to the diocesan Schools Commissions. The *Catholic Directory* continued to publish crude figures varying in quality from poor to dreadful, instead of the detailed figures of very good quality that could never be ready in time to meet editorial deadlines. So, for 34 years detailed statistics of very good quality were never published, while the *Catholic Directory* has continued for almost a century to publish crude statistics in which no professional statistician can have any confidence.

However, I must stress that throughout the 31 years when the CEC was responsible for the preparation of these pastoral statistics it never refused my requests for copies of the annual summaries. They were eventually published with the permission of the Standing Committee of the CBC (Spencer, 2006a).

After the CES took over from the CEC the editing and preparation of these pastoral statistics the system seems to have collapsed. No detailed statistics apparently exist for the years 1992 to 1996, but the CES did prepare them for 1997 and 1998, and they seem to be of good quality.

The system was rationalised again at the start of the new millennium. Dioceses now – as was the case before 1960 – edit and tabulate the returns. The diocesan summaries are then sent for collation to the CBC. The latter has kindly made these tables available to the PRC, and has placed no restriction on their publication. However, by 2004 it was clear that there were great variations in the skill and diligence of diocesan administrations in collecting, editing and tabulating these pastoral statistics. We were soon finding massive errors and concluded that it would be irresponsible to publish them until they had been re-edited (at least at diocesan level) and revised where appropriate. We abandoned our *Report to Parishes* for 2003 but later published re-edited figures in Vol. I of our *Digest of Statistics, 1958-2005*.

Catholic school statistics

The bishops have been collecting statistics of Catholic schools and their pupils since the middle of the nineteenth century. But the statistics lacked detail and were of poor quality. When in 1954-5 the NDS was preparing estimates of the numbers of Catholic children, by age and sex, there were no comparable statistics of Catholic and non-Catholic pupils in Catholic schools by age and sex.

So, with the encouragement of the CEC the NDS carried out a census of all Catholic schools and their pupils in January, 1955. The census was managed by the late Ronald Barley, Chief Examiner of the Institute of Actuaries, and Audrey Donnithorne, lately Emeritus Professor at the University of Hong Kong. Preliminary results were tabulated in October, 1955, in time for a comparison with the demographic estimates. They showed that one third of Catholic children were not being educated in Catholic schools (Dean, 1958).

In 1958 the CEC commissioned the NDS to carry out another census of Catholic schools, in January, 1959; and each year from 1960 to 1964 the NDS carried out a schools census for the CEC, the results being published in the CEC's biennial *Catholic Education. A Handbook*. These censuses continued until 1991, when the CEC was reorganised as the CES. The latter continued the annual censuses but the tabulated results for the years 1992 to 2006 were not published. The circumstances leading to the publication of *Digests* for 2007 and 2008 are described in Part IX.

The response rate in the first census, 1955, was below a level that might be regarded as satisfactory. And that seems to have been the case in 2008. Apart from that I am not aware of any grounds for questioning the professionalism of any of the censuses from 1955 to 2008.

Recent developments

During my decade at the helm of the NDS it was made clear to me over and over again, mainly by Derek Worlock, then Private Secretary to the Archbishop of Westminster, that there was a general presumption that nothing should be published without explicit permission, and that this applied not only to different categories of ecclesiastical statistics but also to papers and reports to which such statistics contributed little or nothing. It seemed that his main concern was to avoid any possibility of the Church losing face as a result of something published.

His anxieties, and those of other Church leaders, were unabated in April, 1975, when a paper I had prepared at the invitation of the editor of *The Month* (Spencer, 1975: 100-105) demonstrated that the steady upward movement of pastoral and demographic indicators had, from 1963, been replaced by downward indicators. Church leaders were outraged.

Twenty-eight years later Church leaders were not outraged by my paper *Report to Parishes, 1958-2002* (Spencer, 2004). They were no longer in denial about what I saw as the greatest demographic catastrophe for the Catholic Church in this country since the Reformation..

In 2004 I sought from each Diocesan Bishop permission to publish NDS reports and papers. Early in 2005 the Standing Committee of the CBC declassified all of them, leaving me free to start publishing them. Although the CBC has not acted on the advice that I have given repeatedly (especially in Spencer, 2006) about rationalising the pastoral statistics system, neither the CBC nor individual Ordinaries have obstructed my access to pastoral statistics, or to my use of them.

In conclusion

Looking back over 57 years of personal involvement in the preparation, analysis and use of statistics about the Catholic community and the institutional Church, one feature strikes me about the attitudes of Church leaders to secrecy and openness: their moral focus on **not telling lies** rather than on **telling the truth**. At the Lay Apostolate Congress in Rome in 1968 I watched for half an hour as a greatly respected Canadian Cardinal wriggled this way and that to avoid both telling lies and telling the truth.

The training of priests in moral theology in the first two thirds of the twentieth century put great emphasis on **not** telling lies, but no emphasis at all on **telling the truth** in **non**-theological matters. Their studies of the New Testament, the Fathers and the early Councils focused on the deposit of faith

and its gradual development. Here men and women had died for the truth. Non-theological truth did not seem to matter – until it was perceived as having theological implications, as Galileo discovered.

So we have had an institutional formation of future bishops that saw theological truth as supremely important, and non-theological truth – even about the Catholic community and the institutional Church – as of little or no importance. Bishops would be appalled if they were accused of either purveying what they perceive as false doctrine or false statements about individuals. Yet they have no moral concern about allowing the *Catholic Directory* to publish crude statistics that are untrue, and have no moral concern about presiding over the pastoral statistics system currently in place that produces in some instances excellent detailed statistics, in most cases mediocre statistics, and in a few statistics that are manifestly false. And they were, and remain, quite content to allow the CES to withhold from the public, the media and academics the detailed results of all the school censuses from 1992 to 2006, and to obstruct access to unpublished school statistics for 2007 and later years.

V. ACCESS TO DIOCESAN ARCHIVES

Earlier this year the National Archives at Kew started a comprehensive survey of all religious archives in the United Kingdom. The resulting information will not be put on-line for some time, and as we wanted information on access to Catholic diocesan archives for this paper I wrote on 18 June to all diocesan archivists. Responses that had reached me by 15 August are summarised below.

Eleven archivists have yet to reply. Of the eleven replies received so far:

Diocese A has a cut-off date of 30 years “although this does not apply to anything which is or is deemed to be already in the public domain (e.g. statistical returns) ...” The archivist in question has already supplied a copy of the Annual General Statistical Questionnaire of the Diocese to the Secretariat of State for 1981 and 2001.

Diocese B. reported a 30 year closure on all files “except where within the 30 year period the document in question has already been in the public forum (e.g. a parish newsletter). We also reserve the right to withhold material deemed to be sensitive even when it is beyond the 30-year limit.”

Diocese C replied: “...No one has right of access to these archives.... All research is at the discretion of the Archivist acting under the authority of the Bishop.”

Diocese D replied that the diocesan archives “do not have any cut-off dates. Bishop ... removed all restrictions for genuine research. Researchers must have specific aims before being granted access to the Archives. The only restrictions that may be applied by the Bishop would be on access to any confidential records of individual clergy” This archivist has already supplied a copy of the annual statistical return to the Secretariat of State for 2001.

Diocese E reported a “general closure date of 30 years with several provisos”. This archivist has already supplied a copy of the annual statistical return to the Secretariat of State for 1972.

Diocese F reported that “access and closure policy is not something that has ever been settled for this Diocese although there has been a vague policy that no personal files would be made available ... any later than 1940 (I believe).”

Diocese G gave no details of access rules. Further information has been sought.

Diocese H wrote: “as a general rule, no documents later than 1974 may be consulted. Material prior to 1974 which is deemed by the Archivist ... to be sensitive may be withheld.... Searchers wishing to see material later than 1974 must give, in advance and in writing, their reasons”

Diocese J. “I am still sorting mountains of paper, and to date I do not know the full extent of the holding....30 years is the general cut-off date and 100 for sensitive personal information....” The archivist added “there is as yet no statement of policy, or items marked ‘closed’ When I have a clearer

picture of the Archive holdings I intend to consult with the Bishop and/or Trustees to determine cut-off dates.”

Diocese K. “...we do not have very clear regulations.... In regards to specific cut-off dates, we do not receive material that is less than 30 years old. But there is no laid down specified cut-off date.... It is all done on a judgemental basis.”

Diocese L. “The general cut-off date for our archives is 75 years, but I am willing to find information on an ‘ad hoc’ basis, providing that it is not sensitive. Most of our archives pre ... 1947 have been deposited on loan to the ...Library ... with a closure of 75 years.”

Several of the archivists who did not reply referred my letter to the Catholic Archives Society, whose Chairwoman, Mrs Harcourt Williams, replied on their behalf, outlining the context and extent of their work. *Inter alia* she wrote:

(i) “Diocesan archivists are happy to open the archives in their care and to supply information to serious researchers whenever it is possible to do so.”

(ii) “... diocesan archives are private and there is no public right of access.”

(iii) “... diocesan archives contain material ... arising from the dioceses’ dealings with other bodies *The diocesan archivist has not power to make these ... available to anyone or to provide information from them unless this was agreed to when [they] were received.*” [My italics].

(iv) “... the CAS recommend that diocesan archivists identify archives in their care that have been created by other bodies and act in accordance with the closure periods of the creating body.”

The crux of the problem of secrecy in Catholic archives lies in (iii) above. Practically all archives, public and private, ‘contain material arising from dealings with other bodies’ Such material represents much of, most of or all of most public archives. Very soon the 30 year limit comes down to 20 in public archives. In my private capacity, and as officer of a number of institutions concerned with the development of integrated schools in Northern Ireland (where the children of Catholics and Protestants are educated together on a footing of equality), I wrote many letters and memoranda for ministers and senior civil servants. All these will then be open to inspection. I will not be asked for permission, nor will any of the institutions of which I was an officer. A few of these papers, written in the 1970s, are already in the public domain, but there will soon be many more.

What separates the diocesan archives from public archives is (ii) above, that they are private. If they choose not to disclose ‘the dioceses’ dealings with other bodies’ (i.e. virtually everything they hold that is not personal correspondence) they do so as a matter of *choice* that cannot be challenged by appeal to laws, rule and regulations. They freely *choose* to withhold the material, i.e. to treat it as ‘secret’.

However, they do not all make the same choices. As the examples A to L above show, some are still wedded to secrecy, so that Diocese L has a closure period of 75 years. But others are quite willing to facilitate research that does not involve personal papers, so that the archivist in Diocese D was able to supply a copy of the annual statistical return to the Secretariat of State for 2001, just as a Government Department might be quite ready to supply up-to-date statistical data about its work (if it is not in fact already on the website). My general conclusion from the information received from them so far is that diocesan archivists are struggling – some effectively, some not – with the professional and moral issues confronting them in the twenty-first century, revealing confusion over the issues of secrecy in many dioceses but some success at *aggiornamento* in a minority. A more detailed analysis of these issues will be prepared for publication in a separate paper when all the responses have been received.

As part of this enquiry into access, but mainly because of our long term interest in the statistical data preserved in diocesan archives, we have also asked diocesan archivists – if their access rules allow it – to supply us with copies of their annual statistical returns to the Vatican (currently to the Secretariat of State) for 1901 and then (with a few exceptions) at ten-yearly intervals to 2001. Six responses had reached me by 14 August. Three are still under enquiry; three are summarised above. Responses from sixteen are still awaited. A separate paper on these very important annual returns will be prepared when all responses have been received.

V. ACCOUNTABILITY AND SECRECY

Countless discussions of the social nature of the institutional Church have focused on accountability. For generations the laity have been reminded that the Church is not a democracy. Parish priests are accountable to their bishops, bishops to the Papacy, and the Pope to God.

As already noted the Churches of the Reformation have for centuries submitted financial accounts to their members and representative bodies. And Catholic diocesan trusts have in the last decade or more submitted theirs to the Charity Commission, and had them published on the Commission's website. Many dioceses now publish summaries of their incomings and outgoings in their directories and year books.

The requirements of the Charity Commission have had another little noticed but critically important consequence for ecclesiastical accountability. The Commission's *Statement of Recommended Practice* (SORP), 2005, sets out the legal requirements imposed by the Charities Acts and the Commission's recommendations about good practice. The size of the Catholic diocesan trusts means that they cannot plead the exemptions open to small charities.

SORP has potentially revolutionary implications for the relationship between Catholic bishops and the Catholic community. The exclusively upward philosophy of accountability was buttressed by secrecy over the aims, objectives, strategies and programmes of the diocese. The objects of the diocesan trust might be expressed in theologically acceptable terms – to bring all men to Christ, to give witness to the Gospels, to save souls, to continue the mission of the Church – but just how these were to be achieved was a matter for the bishop. The laity might be invited to comment on the plans for a new church or school (as well as pay for it) but everything else was a matter for the discretion of the bishop. For a decade or more priests and laity have also been invited to submit their ideas on how to cope with the rapidly declining numbers of active priests, so minimising the opposition to the eventual closure of churches, merging of parishes and introduction of team ministries. Few among the laity have the necessary information to do more than express gratitude that (at last) they are being consulted (if not listened to).

However, SORP is already changing the situation where the bishop (with his administration) has all the information, defines the aims, chooses the objectives, selects the strategies and approves the programmes, projects and services designed to deliver them – all more or less in secret, so far as the laity at least are concerned. The diocesan trustees, presided over by the bishop, are required or recommended by SORP 47 to provide in their annual report

- “(a) A summary of the objects of the charity as set out in its governing document.
- (b) An explanation of the charity's aims including the changes or differences it seeks to make through its activities.
- (c) An explanation of the charity's main objectives for the year.
- (d) An explanation of the charity's strategies for achieving its stated objectives.
- (e) Details of significant activities (including its main programmes, projects, or services provided) that contribute to the achievement of the stated objectives.

(f) ...activities undertaken to further a charity's purposes for the public benefit...."

This rational approach to planning activities is then bolstered by SORP 53, arguing that the report should contain:

"(a) A review of charitable activities undertaken that explains the performance achieved against objectives set....

(b) ...details of the performance achieved against fundraising objectives set....

(d) Comment on those factors within and outside the charity's control which are relevant to the achievement of its objectives...."

Finally, SORP 57, on 'Plans for future periods', argues that

"The report should explain the charity's plans for the future including the aims and key objectives it has set for future periods together with details of any activities planned to achieve them."

In 1953, in the naivety of my youth, I took it for granted that the rational information-based approach to organisational activity – part and parcel of life in the developed world, and neatly summarised by the Young Christian Workers as 'See, judge, act' – was also alive and kicking in the institutional Church. I quickly learnt how wrong I was. In the last decade, however, the Charity Commission has opened the door to a new model of accountability, at least in England and Wales. The collegial model of Vatican II was effectively destroyed by *Humanae Vitae*, and the failure of episcopal conferences to intervene effectively – or at all. The institutional Church then reverted to the centralised model of Vatican I, bolstered by upward accountability, the upward flow of information, resident inspectors, quinquennial reports, *ad limina* visits, and the occasional Papal visit.

The Charity Commission – an obvious candidate for the Templeton Prize – has imposed a new model of accountability on the Catholic Church in this country, and if dioceses are to retain the privileges of charitable status they will have to heed it. Some, in these early years, are evidently finding that the contradictions that it reveals (cf Spencer, 2006: 42) are a little awkward. As more and more of the laity, clergy and religious turn to these reports on the Charity Commission website the contradictions, inconsistencies, inadequacies and sheer failures will become much clearer, and more embarrassing.

VI. SECRECY AND THE CURRENT WORLDWIDE PAEDOPHILIA CRISIS

I have no hesitation in joining others who assert that the current scandals over priestly paedophilia represent the worst moral and pastoral catastrophe of the last two centuries. The evidence is so well discussed in the media that there is no need to summarise or assess it here. My present object is to relate it to the issue of this paper, secrecy. This can best be done at four different levels.

The moral theological justification of secrecy focuses on the protection of the innocent individual who would suffer unjustly in the absence of secrecy. But in all the hundreds of cases reported in the media what happened was the very opposite. Moral pressure was put on the child -or vulnerable adult, or the parents - to keep silent. Secrecy was used to protect the perpetrator of the evil at the expense of the innocent victim.

Next is the consequence of secrecy for Ordinaries and major religious superiors collectively. By not disclosing their knowledge of individual cases of abuse to each other they denied themselves any knowledge of the extent of the abuse (Spencer, 2006: 41). Given the paramount secrecy there could be no statistics about sexual abuse until it was too late to stop it, leading to the present hugely expensive COPCA, and the protective systems of dioceses and religious orders (Spencer, 2006: 41-2), a shutting of the stable doors after the horses have bolted.

Third, the scandal avoidance motive effectively created the scandal. Had the normal openness and due processes of developed Western societies been observed half a century ago the apparent surge

in child abuse after World War II might have been avoided. Scandal has very important social functions, like gossip, jealousy, and other rather disagreeable activities on the moral theologians' hit-list. A few well-publicised little scandals in the 1960s might have saved us all – and later victims - from the present catastrophe.

Fourth, the discovery that secrecy had been endemic in the handling by Ordinaries and major superiors of cases of abuse of children and vulnerable adults greatly increased the sense of outrage expressed by and in the media when the wraps of secrecy were finally removed (cf Doyle, 2005 and Doyle, 2010).

VII. SECRECY IN CIVIL SOCIETY

The problem of secrecy is familiar in civil society as unfinished business. In most developed Western societies there is now a philosophy of secrecy that is much more balanced than the moral theology outlined above. The moral theology of protecting the innocent individual is seen in the much more extended expression of the Data Protection legislation. Counterposed to this protective legislation is that of the Freedom of Information, the two being in creative tension. Each has its philosophical roots, Data Protection in Human Rights, and Freedom of Information in political philosophy. Let me now consider four issues that focus on secrecy.

The Freedom of Information legislation refers to public bodies. The charitable trusts through which the Catholic Church works in this country are not public bodies, so no one can invoke the legislation to secure access to statistical or other information. I cannot use it, for example, to secure copies of the statistical reports the CES has prepared annually on its schools censuses over the period 1992 to 2006. Nor can I invoke it to get copies of statistical papers from diocesan archives.

Civil society accepts the critical importance of statistics that are relevant, of high quality and up-to-date. It also now accepts, in this country, that the State's professional statisticians must be protected from political interference. So the work is done by the Office for National Statistics and its professional independence is protected by the United Kingdom Statistics Authority. Sadly, as the Catholic Church in this country has no evident concern for statistical truth it has no counterpart to either of these State bodies.

The Parliamentary scandal over the expenses of MPs and Peers provides another illustration of the damage that secrecy can do. An extremely enterprising and persistent American journalist requested details of the expenses claims of some MPs. The House of Commons administration refused, pleading Data Protection. She appealed to the Information Commission, and won. The Speaker appealed to the Courts, and lost. A Bill was introduced into the House of Commons to exempt MPs from the Freedom of Information legislation, but the Lords threw it out. The journalist won and public fury erupted, not just because of the claims that had been made and allowed but because so many attempts had been made to keep the whole matter secret.

The use of the libel laws to prevent scientists from publishing their conclusions has been a running sore in the judicial process, so has the use of super injunctions to suppress the information that an injunction had been granted, and the well-established practice of the Family Courts in prohibiting the reporting of cases heard in them. In all these cases the use of secrecy adds to the sense of moral outrage.

VIII. THE CONSEQUENCES OF SECRECY FOR THE CHURCH

In *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican II's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, the Council summarised and developed the work of Leo XIII, Pius XI, Pius XII and

John XXIII on social and cultural matters. It embraced the world rather than rejecting it. It accepted the world and rejoiced in it. It put the Church at the service of man rather than demanding man's obedience.

This re-statement and development of the Church's relationship to society is difficult to express in practice in an atmosphere heavy with secrecy. First, dialogue is difficult with a Church that lives and works in secret. In negotiating a commercial contract one party may gain an advantage by withholding information from the other, but in the long run such behaviour does not engender mutual respect and cooperation. It creates suspicion, distrust and conflict. In extreme cases, such as priestly paedophilia and MPs' expenses it results in moral outrage.

Second, in the long run secrecy cannot be maintained. Over the last quarter of a century developments in information technology have made it easier to obtain copies of papers that the owners wish to keep secret. Thanks to well-wishers, the Catholic school statistics that the CES is withholding are coming to me, one by one. But it is an awful waste of precious time, energy and attention to collect them in this way.

Third - and most important - secrecy is often self-defeating. This is especially true of universalistic information (like statistics) rather than particularistic information (about individuals). In society at large the aims, objects, strategies and programmes of major institutions all depend on relevant, accurate and up-to-date statistics. A hospital is not built for Jack, nor a school for Jill. Strategies are not developed for Tom, nor programmes for Dick, nor plans for Harry. Civil society sees to it that the necessary statistics about thousands and millions of Jacks and Jills, Toms, Dicks and Harrys, are constantly available to assess strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the light of the values and aims of the institution. Civil society is quite good at this. When it gets it dreadfully wrong - as with the current world economic crisis - the fault usually lies in the assessments, not in the statistics. When ecclesiastical institutions get it wrong the fault usually lies in bad assessments made in the absence of good statistics. A good illustration was Ground Plan (Lawrence, 1974) when the Committee for the Review of Diocesan Boundaries recommended the creation of eighteen new dioceses, after very lengthy consideration of very little statistical evidence. It does not appear to have studied the detailed pastoral and population statistics prepared by the CEC; it does not, it seems, make any analysis of trends in the CEC figures. Had its recommendations been implemented we would now have at least 38 dioceses. Fortunately only two were created as a result of the Committee's work

Another consequence of statistical secrecy is that crises emerge suddenly, when it is too late to avert them. When the paedophilia crisis erupted in this country costly preventative and palliative action was taken. But it was too late; year after year more old cases have come to light. The uproar I evoked in 1975 provides another example. Failure to publish the excellent detailed pastoral statistics prepared by the CEC from 1963 onwards resulted in no one spotting that that very year marked the turning point when the sustained upward movement of pastoral indicators was reversed. The man who spotted it, in 1975, was sociologist *non-grata*, and so Church leaders went into denial and remained in denial for many years. Had the statistics been published - they were not really treated as secret, but I was the only person outside the CEC who knew about them - the change in trend would have been spotted much earlier by someone *persona grata* in whom the Church leadership had confidence.

Finally, statistical secrecy prevents the development of an informed public opinion. When the secrecy is finally recognised as such - and not just as sheer ignorance - it engenders hostility in the general public, the mass media and academia, and a less than cordial relationship with central and local government.

IX. STATISTICAL SECRECY ABOUT CATHOLIC SCHOOLS. THE SAGA OF THE CATHOLIC EDUCATION SERVICE SINCE 1991

As noted in Part III the CEC published the main results of the annual school censuses from 1960 to 1991. When the CES took over the census the publication of tables ceased.

When working in 2005-6 on Vol. I of our *Digest of Statistics, 1958-2005*, I made several attempts by phone and e-mail to get schools statistics for the years 1992 to 2005. On 16 January, 2005, I wrote asking for information about statistical tables in the CES archives, and recent school census tables. I got no reply. By letter on 20 June, 2006. I gave more details of the statistical tables I was seeking. I wrote again on 6 August (copied to Archbishop Nichols) and got a reply dated 29 August from Mrs Oona Stannard, Chief Executive and Director of the CES saying, *inter alia*:

“...the collection and handling of data is subject to the Data Protection Act. I do not believe that the basis on which the CES collected the data would permit me to make it available to your organisation.”

In February, 2006, Prof. Gerald Grace, Director of the Centre for Research and Development in Catholic Education at the London University Institute of Education, had invited me to contribute an article to its journal, *Networking*. In June, 2008, after the publication of Vol. I of our *Digest of Statistics, 1958-2005*, which lacked detailed statistics on Catholic schools after 1991, I suggested to Prof. Grace that my long overdue article for *Networking* should be on the secrecy of Catholic school statistics. The first draft, sent to him on 3 July, ran to c.2,800 words, far in excess of the prescribed 1,500 words. On 22 July he sent me an edited draft of 1,606 words, with a new title, “Secrecy: the case of Catholic school statistics”. I acknowledged this on 26 August, noting that my pressure had had a miniscule result: the CES had finally published **four** figures on pupil numbers for 2006-7. The corresponding source table from a sympathetic mole had contained **161** figures for 2004-5.

On 6 November Prof. Grace wrote to say:

“Your initial article has resulted in significant policy developments in this area and it can be expected that the situation of openness and reliability that you have long campaigned for will be achieved.

“As with every development of this sort there is an ‘opportunity cost’ about which I must inform you.

“The editor originally sent your article to Oona Stannard (on my suggestion) to give her an opportunity to respond to the points you raised. Her initial response, speaking also in the name of Archbishop Nichols, was to ask us not to publish it because it could be used by secularist and atheist critics to attack the integrity of the Catholic educational system. Peter Boylan and I could see the force of this argument at a time of ‘aggressive secularism’ but we were not prepared to withdraw your article unless the CES provided an article which dealt with the issues. After some negotiation about this Oona Stannard agreed that the CES would provide a relevant article but insisted that it would only be provided on condition that yours was withdrawn.

“We said that we would only agree to this, if an adequate statement on greater statistical openness and appropriate measure of validation was forthcoming.

“The Editor and I formed the judgement that your article had forced the CES to make such a public statement with promises of action which it will be possible to monitor in the future. In these circumstances we decided that your article had in effect achieved its objectives – it had changed the situation and therefore its own publication was no longer necessary. I hope that you will appreciate our reasoning and I hope also that you will take some pleasure in knowing that your long campaign for statistical intelligence and openness is at last bearing fruit.”

In December, 2008, the CES printed its *Digest of 2007 Census Data for Schools and Colleges*, and in January, 2009 distributed copies. Mrs Stannard very kindly included the PRC on its distribution list. On 27 January I wrote to thank her, and asked: “What does the CES intend to do about the gap between 1991 and 2007?” I offered my own services to edit earlier figures in order to expedite publication. I also asked: “Is the CES now willing to allow researchers access to data not included in CES publications, as its predecessor did?”

Mrs Stannard replied on 24 February. On the first question she argued that the CESEW “should put its resourcing into analysing the present and looking forward in our use of statistics and data....I am afraid that this will not leave us with the necessary resources to look backwards or to trawl for the sort of data you are seeking from us.”

On the second point: “...I am afraid that I cannot undertake to provide any reports at present but if you would like to write in again towards the end of this academic year I assure you that we will give your request sensitive consideration.”

I wrote again on 20 July and listed school census reports of which I would like to receive copies. Mrs Stannard replied on 27 July: “I am sorry to disappoint you but I must again point out that CESEW’s resources are sparse and we focus on dealing with securing and promoting Catholic Education in the here and now and for the future....I am afraid that I will not be able to agree to your request for the Census reports that you identify for operational and strategic reasons that I have outlined above.”

Early in 2010 Mrs Stannard was kind enough to send us a copy of the *CES Digest* for 2008. In thanking her on 31 May I wrote at length about the new CES justification for refusing access to its school census reports:

“The annual school censuses of 1992-2006 remain unpublished, and research access is refused. For years this was justified as a consequence of the Data Protection Act, a contention that the Information Commissioner has rejected, and that the CES no longer advances. But last year a new justification was advanced, as in your letter: “...CESEW’s resources are sparse and we focus on dealing with promoting Catholic Education in the here and now and for the future.”

We fully appreciate that your resources are sparse. That is part of the human condition: personally and institutionally our resources are always sparse. We could all do more if we only had the resources. One of the resources that *has* been sparse in recent times has been statistical data about Catholic schools in England & Wales. Some of the data that the CES has collected, edited and tabulated over the years, but not published, could have illuminated consideration of the role of Catholic schools within England & Wales, of Catholic educational policy, the strengths and weaknesses of the system and the opportunities and threats facing it. One of the reasons civil society insists on the collection, editing and prompt publication of statistics is precisely because better information often illuminates the way to better use of sparse resources, while a policy of secrecy often obscures failures and waste.

“Similarly, in the Church as in civil society, we all expect to focus on “dealing with securing and promoting [useful activities] in the here and now and for the future.” *Back to the Future* may be good entertainment, but I have yet to meet anyone who seriously argues that we should focus on promoting useful activities in the past. You and I may deeply regret what has happened (or not happened) in the past, but there really is nothing we can do about it **now**.

“However, there is something I can do **now** about the **future** of Catholic education in this country and it is to write to you again to repeat the requests I made in my letter of 20 July last. I am quite ready to go to London, visit your office and print out copies, ‘though I may need a little help in finding my way round your computer filing system.

In her reply on 4 June Mrs Stannard wrote:

“Thank you for your letter of 31 May 2010. I note all that you say concerning the use of historical statistical data and you[r] willingness to retrieve this from the CESEW archives. However, I regret that we cannot agree to your request. We are currently in the process of collating data for 2010 and nearing publication of the data collected in 2009; I will ensure that you receive a copy of the latter as soon as it is available.”

So, over a period of about six years the justifications that have been advanced for not publishing the annual school censuses have moved in turn from the Data Protection Act to the need to focus on the present and the future, to the sparsity of resources and finally to “we’re too busy”.

The effort to secure for the Catholic community satisfactory statistics – about the schools for which it has over the last century and a half made huge financial sacrifices – has achieved some success. The CES website did in 2008 publish **four** figures about pupils in Catholic schools from the

2007 census. The new annual *Digest of Census Data* raised the number of pupil figures to 42 – out of the scores of thousands tabulated by the CESEW. But it seems that the only way to get the CES to give an acceptable statistical account of the Catholic school system that it services is to take the argument into the public arena. The thousands of charitable trusts, like the CESEW, through which the mission of the Church is carried out in this country, are private bodies: they cannot be compelled to release information; they can only be persuaded. So far, persuasion behind the scenes, and diplomacy, have achieved little more than expensive glossy digests that provide totally inadequate information. The matter has recently been made worse because (I am told) the 22 diocesan schools commissions are to be deprived of the national figures with which they could compare their own. It seems that the only way to end statistical secrecy at the CESEW is to give a very public account of the efforts that have been made over two decades to maintain it.

What is so distressing about the determination of the CESEW to keep secret all – now, nearly all – of the statistics about Catholic schools, their pupils and their teachers is that it is in total contrast to the remarkable change that has taken place in the practice of Church secrecy in this country. The paranoid obsession about secrecy did not end with Vatican II, but a new openness has been evident in the last decade. The CBC de-classified all NDS reports and papers early in 2005. Its Secretariat has sent to the PRC copies of its annual compilation of the pastoral statistics. To the best of my knowledge, dioceses have not sought exemption from their obligations under the Charities Acts to submit accounts and reports to the Charity Commission. Our on-going enquiry into access to diocesan archives has so far demonstrated great differences in their access policies, but it has also provided clear evidence that some of them are quite willing to search for and supply copies of recent statistical reports. The one fly in the ointment is the CESEW, successor to the CEC, which published a great deal of detailed statistical data and had never refused my own requests for tabulated data.

REFERENCES

- ABBOTT, Walter M. (Ed.) (1966) *The Documents of Vatican II*. London-Dublin: Geoffrey Chapman.
- CATHOLIC EDUCATION SERVICE.
(2008) *Digest of 2007 census data for schools and colleges*. London: CES
(2009) *Digest of 2008 census data for schools and colleges*. London: CES.
- DAVIS, Henry (1938). *Moral and pastoral theology*. London: Sheed and Ward.
- DEAN, Geoffrey A. (1958). "Revised statistics of Catholic schoolchildren in England & Wales in January, 1955." *Catholic Education. An Educational Review*, 4 (March): 24-30.
- DOYLE, Thomas P. et al. (Eds.) (2005). *Sex, priests and secret codes, the Catholic Church's 2000-year paper trail of abuse*. Los Angeles: Volt Press.
- DOYLE, Thomas P. (2010). "Still too little, too late". *The Tablet*, 24 July. 264: 8854: 6-7.
- JOHN XXIII (1963). *Pacem in Terris*.
- LAWRENCE, W.R. (1974). *Ground Plan. A suggested scheme for Roman Catholic diocesan boundaries*. London: Catholic Information Office.
- SPENCER, Anthony E.C.W.
(1967) "Statistics, ecclesiastical", pp.672-676 in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Washington: McGraw-Hill.
(1975) "Demography of Catholicism". *The Month*, (April) 8/4: 100-105.
(2004) *Pastoral and population statistics of the Catholic community in England & Wales, 1958-2002. A report to parishes*. Taunton: Pastoral Research Centre.
(2006) *Facts and figures for the twentieth century. An assessment of the statistics of the Catholic community of England and Wales at the start of the century*. Taunton: Russell-Spencer.
(2006a) *Pastoral and demographic statistics of the Catholic Church in England & Wales, 1963-1991*. Taunton: Russell-Spencer.
(2006b) *Second Spring. The demography of the Catholic community of England and Wales, 1850-1965: marriages, baptisms, converts and Catholic population*. Taunton: Russell-Spencer.
(2007) *Digest of statistics of the Catholic community of England and Wales, 1958-2005*. Vol. I. *Population and vital statistics, pastoral services, evangelisation and education*. Taunton: Russell-Spencer
(2008) *The publication of ecclesiastical statistics*. Taunton: Russell-Spencer.
- WOOLGAR, Daniel (Ed.).(2005) *Clergy census 1961. General Tables Vol. I. Secular clergy*.

SECRECY: THE EIGHTH SACRAMENT OF THE CHURCH. THE CASE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL STATISTICS

Anthony E.C.W. Spencer ⁽¹⁾

The penalties for statistical ignorance and the rewards for good statistics

In 1943 the Catholic Bishops went naked into consultations with the Minister of Education, without the necessary statistical clothing. R.A. Butler insisted that “what Parliament will ask for are facts and figures”. The Bishops did not supply them. They couldn’t: the Catholic Church’s statistics were appallingly bad. Despite political pressure, and much bluster over principles and parents’ rights, the 1944 Education Act left the Catholic community facing a massive financial burden. The schools were impoverished and left struggling with debt. The episode poisoned relations between the State and the Catholic Church. Inevitably, the quality of the education provided in Catholic schools was poor. Parents were constantly threatened with ecclesiastical sanctions if they sent their children to non-Catholic schools. And the consequent over-crowding of Catholic schools further reduced the quality of the education provided.

A decade later the Church’s statistics were no better, but in 1953 the Newman Demographic Survey (NDS) started work on their rationalisation. Late in 1958 a NDS report for the Catholic Education Council (CEC) on future teacher training college place needs made a great impression on Edward Boyle, and the 1959 Education Act *halved* the cost to the Catholic community of capital expenditure on its schools. The quality of the education they provided soon improved and by the 1970s competition for places was evident.

Rationalisation and reorganisation

The statistical rationalisation of the later 1950s and early 1960s covered demographic, pastoral and educational statistics. The work was taken over by the CEC in 1964 and high quality detailed statistics were prepared, year by year, up to 1991. The re-organisation of 1991-2 saw the CEC handing over to the Catholic Education Service (CES). The pastoral and demographic statistics system then collapsed. No detailed figures have yet been found for the years 1992-6 and 2000, though detailed (and apparently satisfactory) figures have been found for 1997 and 1998. There was another reorganisation at the millennium, leaving the 22 dioceses with the work of collecting and editing the returns and tabulating diocesan totals. The work of editing these, and collating them to get national totals was given to the secretariat of the Catholic Bishops’ Council (CBC). This latest reorganisation has been a disaster. Ineffective collection, editing and tabulating at diocesan level results in many instances in the inclusion of ridiculous figures in the diocesan summaries that are then collated (without any edit) by the CBC. The latter very kindly sends us a copy each year (without imposing any restriction on their publication).

The detailed pastoral and demographic statistics for the years 1963 to 1991 were never published by the CEC, but it was kind enough to supply copies to me on request (without any restriction on their publication). Eventually the Standing Committee of the CBC kindly permitted me to publish the whole set, in 2006. Detailed statistics on Catholic schools, their pupils and their teachers was collected by the NDS from 1955, and from 1964 by the CEC itself, and much of it was published every other year in its *Handbook*. This stopped with the 1991 statistics. The CES continues to collect this very valuable data each January, at the same time as the DfCSF collects the Form 7 returns. But since the 1991 figures were published these detailed statistics have been treated as secret. Mrs Oona Stannard, the Director of the CES, justifies her refusal to disclose these figures on the grounds that “the collection and handling of data is subject to the Data Protection Act”. This justification is not accepted by the Information Commissioner, whose ruling is reproduced at the foot of this article.

⁽¹⁾ The writer is secretary of the Pastoral Research Centre Trust. The views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of the Trustees

The consequences of statistical secrecy

Does this secrecy really matter, when we know that the data is collected? It certainly matters to educationists and social science researchers. But to the Catholic community – which pays for the work? If there were to be another crisis like 1943 Archbishop Nichols, as Chairman of the CES, could simply pull the figures out of a hat and present them to the Secretary of State. That is exactly what happened late in 2006 over the Government's demand that 25% of places in grant-aided Catholic schools should be reserved for non-Catholics. Mrs Stannard told the media that non-Catholics already had 30% of places in Catholic schools, and that figure was repeated twice by Archbishop Nichols. It did the trick. Reporting its interview with Lord Adonis *The Tablet* (4 Nov., 2006: 6) wrote: "On the question of places in Catholic schools, however, Lord Adonis claims that the CES 'takes pride in the fact that 30% of pupils in Catholic schools are non-Catholics'. But that is different from forcing 25% across the board."

Unfortunately, the 30% was fable, not fact. CES Schools Statistics Report 1, 'Summary of pupils by Sex, Religion and School type' (kindly supplied by a sympathiser and reproduced at the foot of this article) shows that there were 134,357 'other' (ie non-Catholic) pupils in Catholic grant aided schools out of a total of 657,590 (ie 20.43%). So Ministers, senior Civil Servants, MPs and Peers were misled: the figure was 20% not 30%. I am sure that neither Mrs Stannard nor Archbishop Nichols deliberately made a false statement. Mrs Stannard was trained as a teacher, not as a statistician. The CES has a resident IT expert, but not a statistician. It seems that Mrs Stannard simply took the percentage of non-Catholics in Sixth Form Colleges (50.3%), added it to the percentage in primary schools (19.0%), and to the percentage in secondary schools (20.9%). Then, dividing by three she got the figure of 30.07%.

Despite my protests to the CES, and several letters to Catholic papers (not published), this untrue figure of 30% has never been corrected (or explained). Had the detailed statistics collected each year been published routinely the error would have been spotted quickly. And routine publication would have led to the development of a large body of derivative analytical data – such as the percentage of non-Catholic pupils and teachers in each diocese and in each type of school. Such derivative data would have been generally known among educational administrators - as it was from 1963 to 1991, when the percentage of non-catholic pupils gradually rose from 0.9% to 11.6%. Someone would have spotted at once that the 30% figure was way out.

Manifestations of secrecy

How are we to explain this secrecy, which has troubled me personally over five and a half decades of work as a demographer, sociographer and sociologist? Is it not extraordinary that the Church, *committed to the truth*, is so reluctant to *tell the truth* and goes to such lengths to *conceal the truth*? This reluctance is manifested in three ways. First, there is a reluctance to *discover* the truth, above all in a quantitative form (e.g. statistics and accounts). So in many important matters (e.g. Catholic social welfare services) statistics are simply not collected and tabulated. Second, when they are collected the work is done in such a careless and inexpert way that the figures that finally emerge are often so bad as to be useless for most practical purposes. (Paradoxically they are then often published). This is a fair description of all Catholic statistics in England & Wales from 1911 to the later 1950s. Third, if relevant statistics of an acceptable accuracy are prepared we often find that they are left unpublished, or deliberately treated as secret.

I have encountered this ever since I established the NDS in 1953. At the outset we had to accept a general presumption of non-publication. This did not apply just to unpublished data obtained from ecclesiastical sources. The price of ecclesiastical cooperation was an embargo right across the board:

practically everything had to be 'cleared' before publication. In 1960 a report commissioned by the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) was suppressed at the request of the Archbishop of Dublin. It had to be sent to Geneva to be locked in the ICMC safe, and 'never published or publicised'. Fortunately, a copy was found in the archives of Dublin Archdiocese and is to be published shortly by the Irish Manuscripts Commission. In 1963 Derek Worlock's paranoia about secrecy derailed the reorganisation of the NDS. A few weeks later I was ordered by the CEC to withdraw from an engagement to read a paper at a conference of my employers, the Newman Association. I was warned that if I read the paper the Bishops would withdraw their support from the NDS. I went ahead and read the paper. That December Archbishop Heenan told me that the Bishops were withdrawing their support. I eventually published it 42 years later, in 2005. Reading it then I simply could not understand what the fuss had been about. In 1966 I started a study for the New Zealand Bishops on the organisation of Catholic education in New Zealand. At the conclusion of my fieldwork I briefed them on my initial conclusions and recommendations. They did not like them. Eventually they terminated the project, and refused to take delivery of the 560 page report. Fortunately, half-a-dozen copies had already been sent to referees, and were widely circulated. The result was the 1975 Conditional Integration Act of the New Zealand Parliament, which saved the Catholic school system from catastrophe. Consent to publication of the report was withheld, but I published it in 2005.

Why the secrecy?

There seem to be six explanations for this state of affairs. The first is the tradition of secrecy within the Church, going back many centuries and giving rise to the jibe that 'secrecy is the eighth sacrament of the Church'. It is not a specifically English tradition; it seems to spring from the Roman Curia, which is extraordinarily reluctant to allow access to its archives. The State in this country has a 30 Year Rule, so that almost all archive material is open to inspection within a generation, while the Freedom of Information Act makes it possible to investigate very quickly the working of government at all levels. When will Catholics be able to examine – either in this country or in Rome – the 2007 statistical returns sent to Rome earlier this year? In 2037, 2057, or 2107 – or never?

A second explanation is organisational paranoia. In a paper I wrote in 1964 ⁽²⁾ explaining the destruction of the NDS I argued that Church officials may be willing to use the social sciences for administration, for planning and for the development of strategy, but would seldom countenance them for a study of ecclesiastical structures.. The trouble is that they personally are totally identified with those structures. The paranoia I encountered over and over again in the very suave and diplomatic Derek Worlock was that of a man fearful that the organisation of which he was an important member *might* be disturbed or damaged if statistics were published. And of course he was absolutely right. If the figures look bad companies go bust, major strategies are abandoned and governments lose elections and the power that springs from them. That is why in both the economy and in politics norms are established, and zealously protected, to ensure that however bad the real figures are they have to be *carefully and professionally prepared, and published on the due date*. When they are not we have ENRON and contemporary Zimbabwe. This is particularly a problem for Latin Rite Catholicism, as a result of clerical celibacy. The priesthood is not just a 'greedy' profession, demanding so much of its members. In the Latin Rite its members cannot escape into another role – such as father or husband – to avoid or minimise the strain of their work role. This over-identification with their work role can engender paranoia, and intense fear of anything that might weaken or disturb the organisation that gives meaning to their lives.

⁽²⁾ Spencer A.E.C.W. "The Newman Demographic Survey, 1953-1964: reflections on the birth, life and death of a Catholic institute for socio-religious research." *Social Compass*, XI (3/4), 1964: 31- 37.

The third explanation is related to the second: ignorance of the social sciences in general, and the statistically-based social sciences in particular. A century after Durkheim, and Weber we now have an English Bishop with a doctorate in sociology. In the half century prior to his translation to Birmingham we had half-a-dozen priests with degrees in sociology, all studiously ignored by the Bishops. Priests and bishops educated just in theology, philosophy and the humanities seldom have any appreciation of either the potential or the limitations of the social sciences. They fear that the publication of statistics could greatly reduce their scope for making the decisions that seem best to them. And again they are absolutely right. Once data has been quantified it can be analysed statistically to yield conclusions most bishops and priests could not imagine. But neither can they appreciate the effects of probability that may reduce confidence in those conclusions. They cannot appreciate the potential, and fear what might emerge in the light of day, which 'might disturb the simple faithful'. Better to keep it all under wraps. Then no one can argue for alternative approaches and decisions.

The fourth explanation is desire for an easy life. It is very easy to make decisions if there are practically no relevant facts to illuminate the problem. Instead the problem can be dealt with *a priori*. In social contexts larger than the household the relevant facts are usually quantitative, though even households usually have a bank account. Exceptionally the personality of a leader may be the most important relevant fact. Where this is not the case a *good* decision may require a great deal of quantitative data, but the more extensive the data needed the longer and more difficult is the task of making the *right* decision. In some contexts – on the field of battle, or driving at 70mph on the motorway – the decision *must* be made quickly, on the basis of training, experience and judgement. But bishops are not colonels, or truckies. It is so much simpler to dispense with the hard work, go to the chapel, say some prayers, and leave it all to the Lord who really knows best.

The fifth explanation is a conscious or sub-conscious detestation of figures, a conviction that humanity is degraded if decision-making is focused on large numbers, rather than on Jack and Jill personally. In a household we always focus *particularistically* on Jack and Jill; in a classroom the teacher tries to focus on twenty or thirty Jacks and Jills, sometimes with success. But in larger social contexts the only way to understand is to count the Jacks and Jills having particular characteristics – gender, age, form, type of school, whether Catholic, and SATs scores i.e. to consider them *universalistically*. But this is felt by some to be 'treating them as statistics'. So the common needs of Jacks and Jills are ignored. Publishing statistics of Catholic schools focuses on common problems and needs, and not on Jack's or Jill's. So they don't get published.

The sixth explanation is power. If I am what is nowadays called a 'control freak', and *I* have all the information *I* need, and *you* don't, then *I* and not *you* have the power. If that information is about *you*, *your* profession, *your* administration, *your* success and *your* failure, it matters all the more that *I* have that information and not *you*. *I* can publish little reports and papers, using *my* statistics about *you* and *your* work to show what a good job the system is doing under *my* leadership. And by publishing only what *I* think fit *I* protect myself from any criticism of *my* work. If there is a problem *I* can always pull some figures out of a hat to show that all is well. And if no one else has the figures in the hat *I* will remain immune from criticism. It is precisely to prevent or impede this that the civil and criminal law, and the conventions of advanced Western societies, require both economic and governmental institutions to collect, edit, process and publish statistics about their operations.

Figures from the hat

You will ask: how did I come to have a copy of Report 1 of 2007? I have been the happy recipient of large numbers of unpublished reports over 55 years. If they are sent to me on the clear understanding that I will respect their confidential character, I do so. Later I often seek, and get,

permission to publish them. But many of the unpublished reports I receive are secret, and have been sent by those who share my sense of moral outrage over this ‘eighth sacrament of the Church’. I receive them with gratitude *and will be delighted to receive many more*. One day I may publish my collection. But I would much prefer the CES to publish its secret statistics itself – as most Government departments do – on its website, or supply copies on request.
AECWS 3.7.08

ANNEXE
A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF THE DIGEST OF THE 2008 CENSUS DATA
FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS PUBLISHED BY THE CATHOLIC EDUCATION SERVICE

INTRODUCTION

This is similar in most respects to the *Digest* for 2007. There was, however, a large drop in the response rate, from 97% in 2007 to 84% in 2008 (nevertheless described as ‘credible’). To cope with this the Catholic Education Service of England & Wales (CESEW) changed the treatment of non-response. In the 2007 *Digest* the national *Edubase* was used to supply the missing data about the numbers of pupils in particular schools. (It is not clear whether *Edubase* also supplied the numbers of teachers in the non-reporting schools.)

The procedure used for the 2007 *Digest* excluded the seventeen sixth form colleges. All the 2007 *Digest* tells us is the number of colleges. So the total number of pupils and teachers in Catholic schools in 2007 is not given.

The *Digest* for 2007 gave no comparative figures for 2006, nor for any of the years since 1991, for which the CESEW has published no school census statistics. The *Digest* for 2008 does not in fact provide any summary table comparing 2008 with 2007. It took me well over four hours to construct the following table from figures in different parts of the two *Digests*.

	Maintained primary & sec.			Sixth form colleges			Mtd & 6 th form colls			Independent			Totals in Appendices		
	Schools	Pupils	Teachers	Colls	Pupils	Tchrs	Schools	Pupils	Tchrs	Schools	Pupils	Tchrs	Schools	Pupils	Tchrs
2007	2,144	779,022	44,922	17	..	..	2,161	..	..	154	45,304	5,479	2,315	..	..
2008	2,131	636,631	37,502	17	17,639	1,239	2,148	654,270	38,741	153	35,911	4,093	2,301	824,912	28,741

It will be seen that for both 2007 and 2008 the total number of schools in the appendices corresponds with the sum of the totals in the main tables, at 2,315 and 2,301 respectively. But for 2008 there had been in the main tables no correction for the 16% under-reporting. The uncorrected 2008 figures suggest a fall of 18.3% in maintained primary and secondary enrolment, and a fall of 20.7% in independent school enrolment. The main tables show a total 2008 enrolment of 690,161 (including independent), but in the appendices a total of 824,912 is given, without explanation. Presumably this represents the reported enrolment plus corrections based on *Edubase*. The main tables show a teacher total of 42,834 – reflecting the great reduction in the response rate – but the figure in the appendices is 38,741 (which is the uncorrected total in the maintained schools, including the sixth form colleges). So we have the extraordinary position that in the appendices the total number of schools (corrected) equals the total in the main tables (84% response rate), while the total for pupils has apparently been corrected and is 19.5% above the uncorrected main tables total, and the teachers total is uncorrected and excludes the independent schools. Is that quite clear, children?

THE MAIN PROBLEMS

There are three major problems in using these *Digests*: sparsity of raw data, table headings and lack of balance between raw data, percentages and comment.

Sparsity of raw data

Taking pupils in the 2008 *Digest* as an example, there are four raw figures (excluding totals) in Table 6A. Table 6B adds another six raw figures, Table 7B adds three, and so does Table 7C. Table 8A adds two, as does Table 9. In Appendix, 2 Table 2.1 adds 22 raw figures, for dioceses. So the 2008 *Digest* gives just 42 raw figures about the pupils for whom the schools exist. We are not even told how many were boys and how many girls, nor their ages.

The lack of raw statistical data makes it almost impossible to do anything with these *Digests* other than read the extensive commentaries provided by the editor.

Table headings

These present a real difficulty when scanning the 'Contents' pages because they don't tell the reader what to expect in the tables listed. Appendix 3 in the 2008 *Digest* is headed 'Teachers in Maintained Schools and Colleges', and Table 3.5 is headed 'RE Teaching (Primary Schools)'. But the table is not about teachers; it is about schools, telling the reader how many primary schools in each of the 22 dioceses have at least one RE specialist. The same table also tells the reader how many primary schools there are in each diocese 'where one or more classes is taken by teaching assistant(s)'. Worse, it leaves the reader in doubt whether these teaching assistants are there specifically to teach RE or whether they are to teach other subjects. On the whole of the page there are only 50 numbers; there is plenty of space in the left half of the table to have a column giving the number of primary schools in each diocese, followed by the existing column of figures, and that in turn with percentages. Then on the right half of the table the ambiguous heading could be replaced and the existing column of numbers followed by percentages. The table heading could then be changed to something like 'Primary schools having at least one RE specialist, and those having one or more classes taken by a (RE?) teaching assistant, by diocese'.

Lack of balance between raw data, percentages and comment

Again using pupils as an example, there are 598 percentages in the *Digest* for 2008, but only 42 raw figures. Without the percentages innumerate readers could learn next to nothing from this *Digest*. With them numerate readers will save time and effort. But without more raw data numerate readers can do little more than read the commentary. In most tables there is plenty of white space for raw data as well as percentages. For example, on pp.11 and 12 there is ample white space for raw data as well as percentages. The fault lies not with too many percentages but with too little raw data.

The provision of a commentary on both the raw data and the percentages is most commendable. But the balance is quite disproportionate. Again, the problem is not too much commentary but too little raw data.

For years the CESEW refused to publish the annual school census results by citing the Data Protection Act. Reading the *Digests* for 2007 and 2008 one can find nothing that could in any way have justified the refusal to publish similar *Digests* for each year from 1992. For fifteen years the Catholic community, the general public, academia and the media were denied access with neither justification nor apology. Now that something has at last been published the excuse of 'sparse resources' is used to justify not opening up the past. Yet the CESEW can devote sparse resources to an expensive glossy report. Much of the space in it is given over to commentary that some might characterise as 'spin',

while space has been wasted rather than used to provide further raw data that readers might like to explore.

Over the years the CESEW has in turn relied on, abandoned and then re-invoked the Data Protection Act as justification for refusing either to publish or to allow access to the statistical reports prepared after each of its annual censuses of Catholic schools. The CESEW – or Mrs Stannard personally – seems to have overlooked the cultural acceptance in the Western world of the publication of ‘personal’ information about people who hold public office, whether they be Pope, President, Prime Minister, prelate, priest or school principal. The CESEW entry in the *Catholic Directory* names her, and we can infer her gender from her title ‘Ms’. It also names the Chairman, who is the Bishop of Nottingham. If we consult the *Nottingham Diocesan Yearbook* we can see his date and place of birth, the date of his profession as a Dominican, and the dates of his priestly and episcopal ordination. The entry for the Nottingham Cathedral parish names all the clergy and the two parish sisters, and gives the names, titles and professional qualifications of the Organist and Director of Music and his two assistants, and the names of the Chairman of the Parish Pastoral Council and the Safeguarding Representative. In its Schools section the *Yearbook* discloses the names and gender of the principals of the Catholic schools, and in many cases their marital status and/or professional qualifications.

The other Trustee of the CES is the Bishop of Wrexham. In addition to the information provided in the Nottingham *Yearbook* the *Directory* entries for Wrexham give the years of birth of the secular clergy. Both dioceses publish extensive pastoral statistics every year. There is an extraordinary contrast between the openness of these two Trustees in their own dioceses and the long-standing secrecy of the CES, of which they are the only Trustees.

I have searched through the large PRCT collection of secret Catholic school census reports and have not found the name of a single person or school. Even if I did, would it matter if all this information is readily available in diocesan directories? And how could a school function if all other institutions of the Church adopted the CESEW approach to ‘personal’ information.

After years trying to get these statistics published I am left with six questions. First, what is the CESEW – or Mrs Stannard – trying to hide? Second, how is it that Catholics in the media and academia have allowed this to go on, year after year since 1992, without protest? Third, does the expensive, glossy but very unprofessional presentation in these *Digests* of scraps of data collected in the school censuses of 2007 and 2008 point to a major weakness in the staffing of the CESEW? Fourth, is this extraordinary situation a consequence of the change of control at the top of Catholic education in this country from the former Catholic Education Council, which had a reasonable representation of the Catholic community – parents, educationists, academics, teachers, religious orders and diocesan school commissions, as well as a Bishop – to a trust with just two Trustees, both of them heavily burdened Diocesan Bishops? Fifth, how are we to reconcile the unrepresentative character of the trust that is responsible for the CESEW with the *Declaration on Christian Education* of Vatican II? Sixth, how can we reconcile the Catholic Bishops’ frequent references to ‘the Public Good’, and affirmations of the rights and responsibilities of parents, with repeated denial of information about Catholic schools to parents and others who have personal and professional concerns about them?

