

Statistics show massive loss of interest in Catholicism in England and Wales

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Following the bad news for Christian leaders generally from the census figures, new research by the Latin Mass Society illustrates a catastrophic decline in Catholicism in Britain.

The [statistics show](#) that the 1960s were peak for Catholic baptisms (138,000) and marriages (47,000) and these have dropped to 64,000 and 10,000 respectively. Most of the figures in the study go back as far as 1913, giving an overarching view of the state of the Catholic Church in England and Wales over a century.

Receptions into the Church (adult conversions) peaked in 1959 at 16,000 but since 1997 have been below 6,000.

The ordination of new priests has shown the most dramatic fall, to only a sixteenth of the 1965 figure.

Dr Joseph Shaw, chairman of the Latin Mass Society, who led the research, said the figures *"show unambiguously that something went seriously wrong in the Church in England and Wales in the 1960s and 1970s. Catholics ceased quite suddenly to see the value of getting married, having large families, and having their children baptised. Non-Catholics no longer perceived the Church as the ark of salvation, and ceased to seek admission. Young men no longer offered themselves for the priesthood in the same numbers as before."*

The number of priests in England and Wales rose steadily from 3,838 in 1912 to a peak of 7,887 in 1965, before beginning to tail off. It recovered for a while in the mid-1990s, but fell to 5,264 in 2011. "In this respect we are still living on our capital, and this capital is about to run out," he said.

In 1965 there were 233 ordinations but since then there has been a steady fall, reaching double figures by 1981. The lowest point was reached in 2009, with only 14 ordinations. 2010 showed a marked improvement, with 23, only to drop again to 16 in 2011.

Other statistics released show an increase in men becoming monks and women becoming nuns, but from a very low base. In 2012, 30 men joined priestly orders, a rise from 19 in each of the three previous years, and the most since 1996. There has also been a significant rise in women joining active orders, from six in 2009 to 23 in 2012.

Because the number of Catholics in England and Wales has increased (mainly due to immigration), the number of priests per 100,000 Catholics has halved since 1947, from 268 to 135 in 2010.

The estimated number of Catholics in England and Wales has increased from 1.8 million in 1912 (when the population was 36.1 million, or 5% of the population) to just over four million in 2010 (when the population was 56.1 million 7% of the population). The Catholic population has been largely inflated by immigration from Eastern Europe.

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