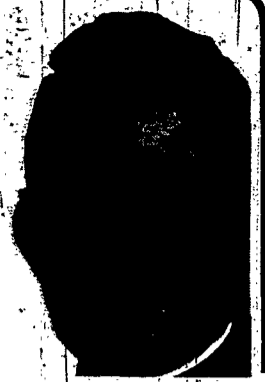


FR. ANDREW GREELEY

The Church: 1971



The long awaited study on the Catholic priesthood is now a matter of public record. It has not been, I must confess, the most pleasant project in which I ever engaged at the National Opinion Research Center. The cross pressures of various conflicting forces in the American Church have been intense. Certain priest association officers, for example, at one point demanded that the data be turned over to someone designated by them in order to assure "objective" analysis. Numerous attempts were made to steal data. Suspicions about the objectivity of the research staff plagued us from both sides of the celibacy controversy. It was made perfectly clear by both sides that any finding that did not concur with its own presuppositions was attributed "biased" research.

I must give full credit to the bishops on the ad hoc committee that sponsored the study. At no point in the three years of collaboration before and during the study did they ever propose anything that was at odds with our professional standards. Never was there any attempt to cover up any of the findings of the project; much less was there any effort to dictate the way the report should be written. Indeed, the acting director of NORC was moved to say that the bishops' committee was one of the most intelligent and sympathetic clients that we have had in a long time.

No one who does research in highly controversial areas is going to imagine that his report will be read with patience and understanding; at least he's not likely to think that after his first experience. When the parochial school study was done in 1965, I naively thought the data Peter Rossi and I reported would settle the controversy over Catholic schools. I was rudely surprised to find that not only did it not settle the controversy, the findings of the report became weapons for both sides.

It is very likely that American Priests will have the same

fate and that its findings will be quoted out of context for years to come.

But I will say for the record what some of my impressions are at a time when after two years of struggling with the study I would be happy never to hear of it again.

1. The American Catholic priesthood has serious problems that have to do with organizational structure and with loneliness. There are many "flash points" of potential conflict between bishops and clergy, and there is much frustration and loneliness among perhaps one-fifth of the priests of the Church. The lot of the associate pastor is not a happy one; something must be done about it, and soon.

2. On the other hand, there is a great deal of strength and vigor left in the American priesthood. I have a hunch that there may be more strength and vigor than there was five years ago (this is just a hunch; nothing I can document). On the measures of psychological well-being we used in the survey, priests scored substantially higher than married, college-educated males in the same age brackets. In other words, if morale was bad among the clergy, it is much worse among the rest of the population.

These two findings may seem contradictory. On the one hand, it is said that the priesthood has serious problems, and on the other hand, it is said that the psychological well-being of the priesthood is high. But I think it is a paradox rather than a contradiction, and paradox is the very stuff out of which hope is made.

There are grounds for pessimism; there are grounds for optimism. There is much strength in the American priesthood; there is much frustration. There are no grounds for despair; no grounds either for complacency. Things have never been worse, perhaps, but they have also never been better.

FR. PAUL J. CUDDY

On The Right Side



Q. Is the rosary out?

A. It is for some. It is not for others. Theologian Karl Rahner expresses a sane spirit. "If a person does not understand or like the rosary, he is perfectly free as a Christian not to say it. Yet for me it is a very wonderful thing, and it is my own private experience that it is said also by people of whom one would not believe it." (Grace and Freedom: K. Rahner — p. 130)

Q. But a well-educated Catholic friend of mine scoffs at the rosary.

A. What a pity. A few years ago some priest ripped a rosary apart in the pulpit as a dramatic opposition to the rosary devotion. What does that prove? One of the oddities of the anti-rosary enthusiasts is an unconscious snobbery. An unhealthy result is that frequently they subtly intimidate others. Result: community rosary is dropped; family rosary becomes more difficult; individual rosary becomes endangered.

Q. But my friend is well educated and reads modern theology.

A. Karl Rahner is well educated and writes modern theology. He comments: "Intellectuals are no better men just

because they are educated. . . . Indeed we (intellectuals) are perhaps in greater danger because we think our theorizing is the same as a true Christian life of prayer, faith, self-denial and humility. Moreover, we may be less truly Christian than the so-called 'simple Catholic', if only because the intellectual is normally better off than they, and can avoid more easily the hardships of life. For example, a mother of seven who must work hard to bring up her family. I am less worried that she might miss the meaning of Christianity than I am in my own case." (Ibid. p. 132.) Why don't you get Rahner's Grace and Freedom. It's published by Herder and Herder, and is expensive: \$5.95. But knowledge and love can never be measured by cash.

Q. My friend says the rosary is repetitious, and is like the Indian prayer wheel.

A. I am sure your friend thinks so, and such may be her personal experience. Indeed the rosary is repetitious. And it is fruitful. St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Thomas More, St. John Bosco, Father Flanagan, Dr. Tom Dooley and Pope John XXIII would have been saddened at this anti-rosary crusade. "By their fruits you shall know them."

Q. I have another friend who likes to say the rosary privately but not in common.

A. Yes, I know him. He is a fine person. He does recite the rosary every day and he does not intimidate others who profit by the rosary in common. It's a personal obsession with him. Occasionally we meet a person who enjoys singing alone, but not in a chorus. Choral singing is a wonderful binding force among those who like to sing. Community prayer, e.g. the rosary, is a wonderful binding force for those who like to pray. For example, the late Father John Merklinger used to schedule a week at the St. Lawrence River for priests who wanted a bit of fishing and relaxation. I used to join the group, usually about a dozen priests. By the way they were all outstanding snorers! One of the joys of the day came in the evening when we would all sit on the porch overlooking the river and recite the rosary together. As the Marseilles is a great unifying hymn for the French people, I think the rosary is a great unifying hymn for Catholic people.

Q. Do you think this unifying force is spiritual or psychological.

A. It has to be both. No one prays abstractly from his psyche. Jesuit Herbert Thurston wrote of the rosary: "That the Rosary is pre-eminently the prayer of the people adapted alike for the use of simple and learned is proved by the daily experience of all who are familiar with it. . . . To the initiated the words of the angelical salutation form only a sort of half-conscious accompaniment, a bourdon which we may liken to the 'Holy, Holy, Holy' of the heavenly choirs and surely not in itself meaningless."

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