

# Report Claims Catholicism, Pre-1960 Vintage, Is 'Finished'

New York (RNS) — Citing a decline in Mass attendance and changing perspectives on sexual morality and abortion as indicators, a "preliminary report" on the status of the U.S. Catholic population suggests that "American Catholicism as it was known before 1960 seems to be finished."

Not only are Catholics becoming "virtually indistinguishable from a Protestant denomination," but the indications are that fewer young people who have been raised Catholic are going to continue to define themselves as members of an organized Church.

The report, which is the first part of a "yearly monitoring program" to survey the attitudes and behavior of Catholics on "certain critical studies," appeared in the Oct. 28 issue of America, the Jesuit weekly review. It was written by Father Andrew Greeley and William McCready of the National Opinion Research Center, Chicago.

Declaring that "there has been no effort to monitor the impact" of changes since 1960 on the Catholic population and stating that American bishops are "unlikely" to undertake such a study, the authors said the 50 million-member U.S. Catholic Church appears destined to "blunder into the future with only the haziest notion about its present condition."

Referring to charts on Mass attendance gleaned from studies since 1963, the NORC report said that between 1963 and 1972 over-all Catholic weekly Mass attendance has declined from 71 per cent to 55 per cent, with the decline "largely attributable to those under 40 rather than the entire Catholic population."

Comparing Catholics and Protestants, the report noted a "sudden shift" in the tradition that Catholics are more frequent churchgoers and observed that "young Catholics are beginning to look more like young Protestants in terms of church attendance."

"One conclusion to be reached," the report said, "is that the (Catholic) Church is no longer meeting the needs of younger members . . ." It added that "whether or not young people still define themselves as Catholics" is a question yet to be determined."

Turning to the moral problems of pre-marital sex and abortion, the report indicated a growing permissiveness in both areas among Catholics, but especially among those under 30.

"As age decreases the percentage of Catholics who say pre-marital sexual relations are 'always wrong' steadily dwindles" and Catholics "have changed more than Protestants when it comes to approving legal abortions for women whose health is endangered, whose baby will probably be defective, or who may have become pregnant by rape."

Acknowledging that the decline in Mass attendance, and changing perspectives on sexual morality and abortion are just three recent shifts in American Catholicism, the authors of the report claim, however, "they are shifts that the official Church

neither recognizes nor appears to care very much about."

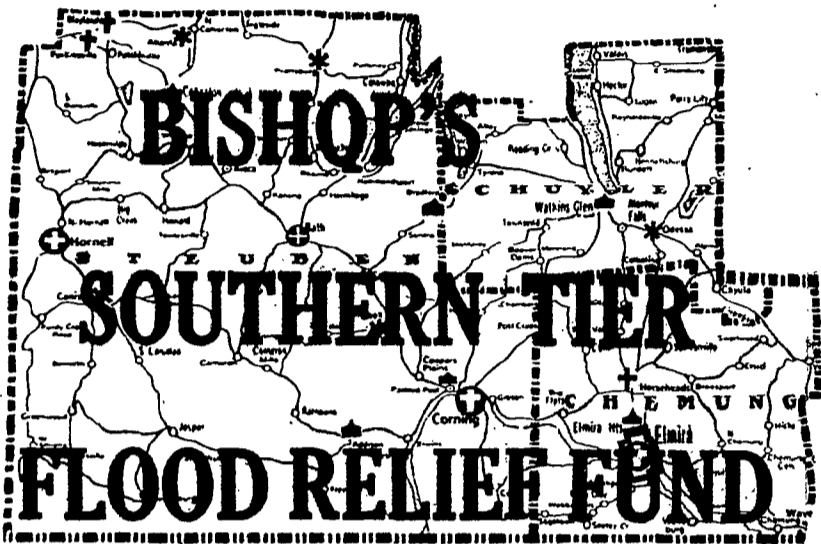
"Whatever the end result," they added, "it can hardly be denied that there is evidence of a coming apart of the traditional, tightly knit, organization of the Church."

Systematically criticizing the defensiveness of the hierarchy, many of the clergy and religious in "post-adolescent identity crises," intellectuals who are "journalists not scholars," and a few Catholic writers, the authors characterized the neo-Pentecostal or charismatic movement as "emotional" and "appealing only to a minority."



Smile Girl

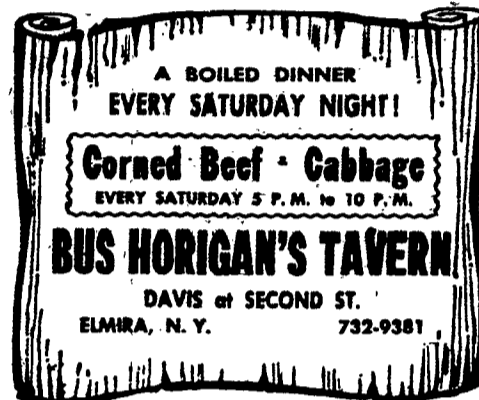
Kristen Dineen, 7-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. James E. Dineen, Standart Avenue and second grade student at St. Alphonsus School, Auburn, was selected as the "Smile Girl" for the 1972 campaign for the United Fund of Cayuga County. Kristen is shown here with associate campaign chairmen, Mrs. Ernest Brown and Vincent Klein.



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