



Occasionally a social researcher cannot believe his eyes. He knows his data are good. He realizes the possibility of sampling variation but he has enough cases to be reasonably confident about his percentages. Still the statistics are so surprising that we can't quite believe that they are true.

Such is my reaction to the latest data on church attendance gathered by National Opinion Research Center. Weekly Mass for Catholics has taken another sharp drop, falling almost to 40 per cent — a decline of 30 percentage points in seven years. There are 360 Catholic respondents in our sample, so the variation from the actual

### Father O'Neill To Speak to Lawyer's Guild

The St. Thomas More Lawyer's Guild, a recently formed organization of lawyers in the Rochester area, will hold its first membership and informational meeting at St. John Fisher College's Becket Hall at 8 p.m., Tuesday, Oct. 28.

Addressing the group on the guild's objectives will be its president, Robert J. Edelman, and the spiritual advisor, Msgr. James C. McAniff, a canon lawyer. Guest speaker will be Father Robert F. O'Neill who will discuss practical aspects of practice and procedure in applying for annulments by Catholics before the Rochester Diocesan Marriage Tribunal. A poll of the lawyer's group indicated that many Catholic clients are unaware of the current changes in procedure in obtaining church annulments.

The guild has a membership of approximately 100 lawyers and judges from the Rochester area. In September they organized and sponsored the 30th annual Red Mass with the assistance of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Monroe County Bar Association.

In addition to self-education on matters of interest to the legal profession and spiritual self-improvement, the organization is to provide a forum for responsible opinion and action on important moral-social issues facing today's society at large.

All persons admitted to practice law in the state, canon lawyers, and law school students are invited to the first membership and informational meeting. The talks will be followed by refreshments and a social hour. Those wishing to attend should contact Christopher D'Amada at 325-4550.

#### NURSE HONORED

The 1975 award for "Exceptional Contributions in Cancer Nursing" has been given to Mrs. Josephine K. Craytor of Rochester by the American Cancer Society's state division.

Mrs. Craytor, who has her B.S. and M.S. in nursing education, is associate professor of nursing at the School of Nursing, University of Rochester, and is also associate director of nursing at the University of Rochester Cancer Center.

population could easily be six or seven percentage points one way or another. But even a 47 per cent Sunday Mass attendance figure would represent one of the most drastic declines in religious practice in the whole of human history.

To make matters worse, the weekly church attendance for those under 40 has fallen beneath 30 per cent. Substantially less than a third of the Catholic adults in the country are going to Mass every week.

Let it be carefully noted that our question asks how often do you go to church while the Gallup organization question asks whether you went to church last week; hence Gallup normally will get a percentage different from ours — at one time lower and more recently higher. Some Catholic editorial writers have not yet been able to grasp that fact.

But however the question is worded and however much "sampling variation" may be, there is no doubt at all about the thrust of the findings: the erosion of religious practice among American Catholics continues and there is no sign of it, bottoming out.

What will happen? Perhaps the editor of "America" will write another one of his pious little editorials casting doubt on the accuracy of the data. Some Catholic enthusiasts will rejoice because they think a small church is better than a large church and because decline in church attendance is a sign that people are now making their own moral decisions.

That's called whistling in the dark.

And some prelates will announce that the churches are filled wherever they go; they don't notice collections going down (even though almost every other priest in the country does).

That's called whistling in the dark, too.

But nothing much else is going to be done.

When you combine these data on continued decline in church attendance with the data reported in this column several weeks ago about the increase in apostasy, you get a picture of a galloping catastrophe.

What to do? Well, you might cancel this column. I'm too negative. Heaven knows you need happy people aboard a sinking ship.

But isn't anyone — a bishop, a cardinal, an apostolic delegate, a secretary of state, a pope — ANYONE going to face up to the fact that we have a crisis of gigantic proportions going on in American Catholicism and that something has to be done about it and done about it now?

Like first of all trying to find out what is going on. Why are people turning away from the church in droves. Everyone has his opinion, but the opinions are not burdened with evidence. How can you respond to a problem when you don't even know what it is?

But, when by definition there is no problem, there is nothing one has to understand, much less anything to which one needs to respond. If everybody would think positive thoughts and if the "pessimists" would go away with their data, then there would be nothing to worry about.

One would never have believed it possible to bury your head in the sand and whistle in the dark at the same time. But for the present generation of Catholic leadership it comes easy.

[Andrew Greeley, priest and sociologist, is Program Director of the National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago.]

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