

Youth Church Attendance Seen Leveling Off

Princeton, N.J. (RNS) — A national Gallup Poll study indicates that the downward trend in church attendance among young people which began in the 1960s has subsided in the 1970s.

"The leveling off of the downward slide in church attendance among youth is, of course, encouraging to the nation's religious leaders, since

the future of organized religion depends in large measure on the religious beliefs and activities of society's youngest adults," said George Gallup in his analysis of the data.

Church attendance nationwide in 1975 remained at the same level as in the four previous years of the decade: 40 per cent of adults at-

tended church or synagogue in a typical week.

Among young people, church attendance dropped from 40 per cent in 1967 in the midst of the downslide to about 30 per cent at the beginning of the 1970s. The figure has remained stable at 30 per cent.

The latest Gallup Poll survey also revealed that young adults (18 to 29 years old) were as active as older adults in religious activities other than church attendance during the test week of the survey.

Nationwide, 20 per cent of all Americans said they had participated during that week in religious activities such as prayer group meetings, Bible reading classes and the like. This included 21 per cent of persons over 30 and 18 per cent of persons 18 to 29.

Other breakdowns of individuals participating in religious activities other than church services included: Protestants, 23 per cent; Catholics, 17 per cent; Men, 17 per cent; Women, 23 per cent; college background, 22 per cent; high school, 21 per cent; grade school, 15 per cent.

Statistics on churchgoing in 1975 reveal that 54 per cent of Catholics

and 38 per cent of Protestants attended church during the test week, and 21 per cent of Jews attended synagogue.

"Churchgoing among Protestants has been remarkably stable since 1964, fluctuating only by a point or two from year to year over this entire period of time," Gallup reported.

"Catholic attendance, on the other hand, is down 17 percentage points from 1964. Most of this decline, however, occurred in the 1960s."

Mr. Gallup noted that "since Jews represent only about 3 per cent of the U.S. population, the number included in these annual audits is necessarily small. Therefore, the results are subject to considerable sampling fluctuations. However, the evidence appears clear that attendance among Jews at synagogue has remained fairly stable over the last 12 years, with 17 per cent having attended in a typical week in 1964 compared with 21 per cent in 1975."

A comparison of Gallup Poll audits made since 1955 — when the annual surveys were started on an annual basis — shows that high points were reached in 1955 and

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1958, when 49 per cent attended in a typical week.

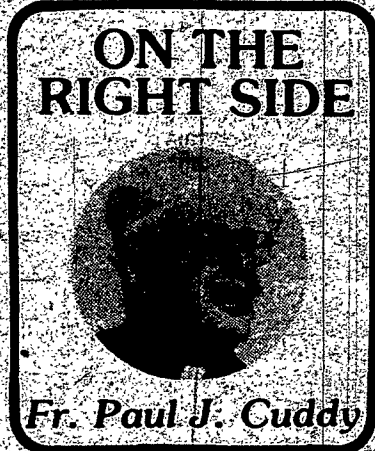
Nationwide, church attendance dropped to 46 per cent in 1956, and rose to 47 per cent in 1957 and to 49 per cent in 1958. It remained at 47 per cent from 1959-61, then dipped steadily until it hit 40 per cent in 1971, where it has remained since.

A breakdown of churchgoing trends among Catholics and Protestants shows that 71 per cent of Catholics and 38 per cent of Protestants attended church during the test week in 1964.

In 1965, Catholic attendance dropped to 67 per cent while Protestant attendance remained at 38 per cent.

Catholic figures from 1966 to 1975 in chronological order were: 68, 66, 65, 63, 57, 56, 55 and 54 per cent.

Protestant figures for the same 1966-75 period in chronological order were: 38, 39, 38, 37, 38, 37, 37, 37 and 38 per cent.



ON THE
RIGHT SIDE

Fr. Paul J. Cuddy

George Bernard Shaw used to describe going to the moving pictures as parking one's brains in the lobby as one sat for a couple hours of non-thinking. If he thought that of the movies, what would he think of most of the TV programs today?

The TV certainly has a potential for great good, and actually is sometimes helpful. For example, to people who live alone the TV is almost a companion, like a dog or cat. People in hospitals usually are not psychologically able to endure sustained mental effort, and to relax while half-watching a play can help while away deadening hours. The Soap Operas? What can we say of them? Father John Guay, a good friend and a scholar, used to follow the Edge of Night every afternoon without fail, to the amazement and amusement of his friends. The TV has, of course, some very good things: e.g. the ball games throughout the year, the now running Adams Family, the long running Civilization series and the like.

But it is a pity that the habit of reading has become so greatly reduced because of TV. Bacon wrote: "Reading maketh the full man." At least the right books can inform, inspire and instruct. For those who like history, books teach us that this generation's troubles and joys are pretty much a repetition of those of past generations.

Many are worried about the Church today, and with reason. Imprudent theologians thrust undigested theories among the people, causing disquiet and confusion; priests and religious women abandoning vocations which we of an older generation accepted as inviolate. Catholics who retain the name but hardly the enthusiasm of the convinced. We probably are forming a judgment by comparing today with the 1950s, when there was a great upsurge of religion after WW II. At that time almost the most popular book was Seven Storey Mountain, by Thomas Merton. It is still popular. You may recall it as the autobiography of a young American who went through the phases of irreligion, crassness, toying with Communism, playing dreadful popular records of the day, even as our youngsters sate their souls on rock and roll today. Yet Merton ended up a convert to the Church, and he became a Trappist monk. Seven Storey Mountain was a spiritual shot in the arm throughout America, and was responsible for many vocations to the religious life.

In the thirties Willa Cather's Death Comes for the Archbishop was a healthy best seller. It was of the life and times of the Frenchman, Lamy, who founded the diocese of Santa Fe in New Mexico. I remember reading it just after high school, and being puzzled that not all the clergy were holy and zealous. Such was my age of innocence. The present day historian of the Southwest, Paul Horgan, has published Lamy of Santa Fe. He

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For further information, call Fred Berger, Group Health Marketing Department at 454-1700.

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