

Second in a series
By FATHER ANDREW GREELEY

The birth control encyclical, "Humanae Vitae," and not the Second Vatican Council, seems to be responsible for the dramatic crisis in American Catholicism. The Vatican Council released strong positive forces in the American Church, forces which were to be canceled out by the encyclical. Had it not been for the council, the impact of the encyclical would have been even more severe.

This conclusion is based on careful computer analysis of two National Opinion Research Center national surveys, one taken in 1963 and the other in 1974, and will come as a surprise to many observers of American Catholicism. It has been argued repeatedly that the council was responsible for the deterioration within the American Church either because conciliar changes had "turned off" a large proportion of American Catholics or because the loosening of the rigidities of Catholicism by the council destroyed the cement which held the Church together.

But even before the computer analysis, there were data available which ought to have called into question this assumption. Apostasy rates had remained unchanged between 1955 and 1967, going up only in 1968 AFTER the birth control cyclical. Similarly, the sharp decline in weekly church attendance began in 1968, as did the massive resignations from the priesthood and the religious life. But despite such hints that the council might not be to blame, the NORC study team, like all other observers, took the conciliar explanation for granted. It was forced to abandon it only in the face of overwhelming data to the contrary.

The Vatican Council appears to have been one of the great religious successes in human history. Many of the fundamental practices and structures of the Catholic Church, unchanged for over 1500 years, were transformed in the space of a few years, months, or even on a single Sunday morning. These dramatic and traumatic changes have won overwhelming acceptance. Two thirds of the American Catholic population thinks that the changes in the Church are for the better (only one fifth thinks they are for the worse).

The majority of every age, ethnic, and educational group in the country support the changes. Eighty-seven percent approve of the new liturgy, and approximately two thirds approve of such diverse things as the guitar Mass, the handshake of peace, nuns wearing lay garb, sex education in the Catholic schools, and new and progressive ways of religious education. The majority are at least somewhat sympathetic to those who have left the priesthood, and about two thirds are in favor of permitting priests to marry. 30 per cent approve of the ordination of women. Catholics, then, approve the changes that have occurred in their Church, and seem eager for even more changes.

Furthermore, there is no negative relationship between support for the council and orthodoxy of behavior and practice. On the contrary, there are strong or at least moderate positive correlations between approval of conciliar change and Mass attendance, Communion

EDITOR'S NOTE: A special series, *The Crisis in American Catholicism*, continues this week. Written by Father Andrew Greeley, director of the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), the series is based on survey findings used for the recently published and controversial book, *Catholic Schools in a Declining Church*. The book has been criticized by Archbishop Joseph Bernardin, president of the U.S. Catholic Conference, who has warned that "Catholic truth is not determined by sociological data or analyses." The series will be the center of much discussion and the Courier-Journal offers it to keep our readers aware of current issues within the Church.

reception, daily prayer, acceptance of the Church's right to teach, Catholic activism, being pleased at the possibility of one's son becoming a priest, and contributions to the Church.

Support for the Vatican Council does not correlate positively with the acceptance of the Church's teaching on divorce and birth control, but neither does it correlate negatively. Whether you like the council or not, in other words, has no influence on your attitudes toward remarriage after divorce and "artificial" birth control.

If the council was not the cause of the decline in the Church, then is it possible that the encyclical "Humanae Vitae" might be the explanation? To account for the change in the last ten years, a complex computer model developed by Prof. James Davis of the National Opinion Research Center was used. This model enables us to ascertain how much of the change in one form of behavior can be accounted for by a change in something else. The NORC team asked how much of the decline in Church attendance, prayer, being pleased with a son being a priest, Catholic activism, confession and contribution could be explained by a combination of the influx of a new generation and a change in acceptance of the Church's sexual teaching. The model accounted for all the change in church attendance/attitude toward a son being a priest, daily prayer, and active Catholicism, three quarters of the change in confession, and half the change in weekly contribution. In each case, about three quarters of the shift could be attributed to the change in sexual attitudes among American Catholics. Furthermore, this change was not attributable to a general decline in the acceptance of the Church's right to teach; it was directly attributable to a change in the acceptance of the Pope as a successor to Peter and as divinely appointed head of the Church.

When attitudes toward the Pope were introduced into the computer models, it was found that the shift in this attitude contributed to about one quarter of the change in Catholic religious practice. Whether the change in sexual attitudes affected the change in attitudes toward the Pope or vice versa is less important than the fact that the two are strongly linked. Taken together, they account for ALL of the change in Catholic practice in the last ten years.

But more than that must be said. The computer models show that if it had not been for the change in attitudes toward sex and the papacy, there would have been an increase in Catholic practice since 1963. Thus, instead of

having fallen from 45 to 31 per cent proportion high in the Catholic activities scale, the proportion would have gone up to 52 per cent. Had it not been for this positive force, which was also at work, the proportion high in Catholic activities would have declined to 24 per cent — a fall of almost one half. Finally, ALL of the positive force is connected with the increase in the reception of Holy Communion, which, it seems fair to assume, was the result of the Second Vatican Council!

The challenge of social change would have faced the American Church without the Vatican Council. According to a study done by the Office of Population Research at the University of Princeton, 38 per cent of American Catholic women were using some unapproved form of birth control in 1960. By 1965, that percentage had jumped to 51, and almost all of the change was accounted for by Catholic women switching from rhythm to the pill. In 1965, 12 per cent of Catholic women in child-bearing years were using the pill, and 28 per cent were practicing rhythm. By 1970, two years after the encyclical, 28 per cent were using the pill and 14 per cent were using rhythm. Sixty-eight per cent were practicing some form of unapproved birth control — an increase of 30 percentage points for the decade. But the use of the pill did not lead to a decline in communion reception; on the contrary, one quarter of those who used the pill in 1970 were going to Communion every week, an increase of 11 per cent since 1965 and virtually the same proportion of weekly communicants as in the national population of Catholics.

It would appear, then, that during the 1960s, American Catholic women began to believe that the birth control pill was an acceptable alternative to the uncertain rhythm method of family limitation. A large proportion of them apparently had made a decision that the use of the pill was not sinful even before the encyclical "Humanae Vitae" was issued. The encyclical did not cause them to reverse that decision, and by the end of the decade, two thirds of American Catholic women were practicing some form of officially disapproved birth control. The pill, in other words, introduced a crisis in the Catholic sexual ethic which would have occurred whether there had been a Vatican Council or not. Catholics apparently made a decision about the morality of the pill before the Pope did, and in reaction to his contrary decision, they have substantially reduced their devotion and loyalty to the Church — even though most of them have not formally left the Church.

It is not up to sociologists to make theological judgments, but speaking purely in organizational terms, the encyclical letter "Humanae Vitae" was ineffective in its stated purpose and a disaster in its effect for American Catholicism. The problem of reconciling the papal teaching with an 85 per cent rejection rate must be left to the theologians. The data in our computer analysis are as conclusive as social science evidence can ever be: The encyclical undid the positive work of the council and turned what might well have been an era of growth into one of sharp decline.

NEXT WEEK: Where are the parochial schools when we need them?

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April 17, 1680. Death, at Caughnawaga near Montreal, of the Mohawk Indian virgin Kateri Tekakwitha. Kateri was born near Auriesville, N.Y., on the Mohawk River, around 1656, the daughter of a non-Christian Mohawk chief and a Christian Algonquin mother. When around four, smallpox carried off her parents and weakened her own eyesight. Jesuit missionaries came to her village in 1667, but circumstances prevented her contacting them for eight years. Then Father Jacques de Lamberville discovered her to be ex-

traordinarily well-disposed to becoming a Christian. After her baptism on April 5, 1676, she increased in fervor under his direction. Subjected to persecution, however, by her fellow-Mohawks, she agreed to flee to the Christian Indian village of La Prairie on the St. Lawrence. Here her growth in virtue was so remarkable that in 1679 she was allowed to take a private vow of chastity. She died in 1680. In 1943, the Holy See gave her the title "Venerable." It is hoped that one day she will be canonized a saint. — Rochester Diocesan Bicentennial Commission.

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REAPPOINTED
Hornell — Gov. Hugh L. Carey has reappointed Sister Mary Rene to an unsalaried position on the board of visitors of the Elmira Psychiatric Center. If confirmed by the State Senate, Sister Rene, administrator of St. James Hospital, will serve until Dec. 31, 1979.

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