

The Crisis in American Catholicism

By FATHER ANDREW GREELEY

One thing has not changed in American Catholicism since 1963: Catholics are still enthusiastic supporters of the Catholic school system. The evidence in the two NORC studies of the impact of Catholic schools suggests that this support is justified. The decline in Catholic school attendance is almost entirely the result of a failure of Catholic leadership to build new schools to keep up with the shifting Catholic population.

More than 80 per cent of American Catholics reject the statement that "the Catholic school system has outlived its usefulness and is no longer needed in modern-day life." Seventy-six per cent support federal aid to Catholic schools (up one percentage point in the last decade). A two-thirds majority think that lay teachers are able to do as good a job in Catholic schools as nuns. Sixty-two per cent think that parents who send their children to Catholic schools should get a refund on local taxes. Thirty-nine per cent think that there would be federal support for Catholic schools if it were not for anti-Catholic feelings in the government, and 30 per cent think that the government should give tuition money directly to parents and let them decide for themselves which school they want their children to attend.

Furthermore, 80 per cent of American Catholics also say that they would be willing to give more money to Catholic schools through their Sunday collections to keep the local parochial school open. Fifty per cent said they would give more than \$50 a year, and 25 per cent say they would give more than \$100 a year extra to keep the school operating.

Finally, none of this support for Catholic schools correlates with age. Catholics in their 20s are just as likely as older Catholics to endorse strongly and to be willing to contribute financially to the continuation of the parochial schools. In the midst of all the other changes of the last decade, then, support for parochial schools has remained rock solid.

Why, then, are there fewer children in Catholic schools (half a million less) than a decade ago? Many Catholic educators have pointed to the increased cost of Catholic schools and the existence of suburban public schools which Catholic parents consider to be superior to parochial schools. But they have overlooked the most obvious cause of declining enrollment: the failure of Catholic school administrators to build new schools in the suburban areas into which the Catholic population has moved.

During the last 10 years Catholic school construction has declined to almost zero but the population movement continues. In 1963, 44 per cent of the children from families in which both parents were Catholics were in Catholic schools. Ten years later this percentage had declined to 29. But based on an analysis of the reasons given for not sending children to Catholic schools, NORC researchers concluded that more than two-thirds of the decline was the result of the non-availability of Catholic schools — almost all of it in the suburbs. The rest of the decline was attributable to increased tuition costs — with better public education being less important as a reason for sending children to public schools than it was a decade ago.

More than half of the parents who do not send their children to Catholic schools cite the physical unavailability of the schools as the main reason. Thus despite the increase in economic success among Catholics and the strong support for Catholic schools, enrollment in them declines — mostly for the very simple reason that those who are responsible for building them have refused to do so.

Do the results of Catholic education justify such vigorous support? The results of NORC analysis of the impact of Catholic schools in 1963 and 1974 indicate that Catholic schools do indeed have an impact on the adult lives of those who have attended them, an impact which compares favorably with measures of effectiveness in other educational impact research. Whether the results of Catholic education are worth the resources put into it is a question beyond sociological

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.

judgment. However, it is a truism that one does not replace a method that has a proven impact with an uncertain one. The NORC research would indicate that the various forms of non-parochial school religious instruction which have become popular in the Catholic Church in the last ten years are not an adequate substitute for parochial schools. In most cases they seem to have practically no effect at all.

In examining the effectiveness of Catholic schools on adult behavior, the NORC research team developed a computer model which took into account how religious one's parents were, one's age, sex, educational attainment, and the religiousness of one's spouse. Hence we have a "pure" or "net" measure of educational impact.

Those who went to Catholic schools were more likely to support the Vatican Council changes in the Church than those who did not. On the whole, the effectiveness of Catholic education remained constant or increased in the last ten years. The number of years one spent in Catholic schools has no relationship at all any longer with one's sexual attitudes. (Support for the Church's birth control teaching among those who had more than ten years of Catholic education fell from 75 to 14 per cent between 1963 and 1974.)

Catholic school attendance has less impact than it did ten years ago on Mass attendance and confession. However, the impact of Catholic education on being a Catholic activist in adult life (belonging to Church organizations, reading Catholic books and magazines, etc.) has increased since 1963, as has the relationship between number of years in Catholic schools and support for religious vocations, financial contribution to the Catholic Church, and positive attitudes toward racial integration.

Furthermore, the influence of Catholic schools has gone up sharply on several important population groups — those who have attended college, those under 30, men, and those from very religious family backgrounds.

There has been a decline in Catholic devotion and loyalty in the last ten years. The increased effectiveness of Catholic schools comes mostly from the fact that the decline has been much less sharp among those who attended Catholic schools. Thus, in times of stress and strain, doubt and hesitation, the effectiveness and the importance of Catholic schools seems to increase.

Furthermore, if the Catholic Church as an organization in the United States is to experience a rejuvenation in the years ahead, it will depend especially on its younger people, on its well-educated, and on those who come from very religious families, and who presumably will be more interested in the Church. It is among these population groups that the effectiveness of Catholic schools in 1974 was most pronounced.

Parochial schools, then, have the support, the money, the importance, and the effectiveness. New ones are not being built, and attendance is declining. The leadership of the American Church seems to have implicitly embarked on a long, slow, and painful process of phasing out parochial schools. The results of the NORC studies would indicate that this may be a serious, indeed tragic, mistake for the American Catholic Church.

NEXT WEEK: The decline in respect for the priesthood.

Rosary Society In Greece Has Unique Idea

What does a bar of soap or a bottle of aspirin tablets have to do with a rosary society?

Plenty if the rosary society is the one at St. John the Evangelist Church on 2400 West Ridge Road in Greece. Either the soap or the aspirin will provide admission to the meeting of the St. John's Rosary Society at 7:45 tonight. The contributions will go the missions, as well as bandages which will be rolled at the meeting.

The busy agenda also includes the movie *Future Shock* and election of officers for 1976-77, according to Sister Marie Adelaide, corresponding secretary.

RETREAT LEAGUE

Mass is celebrated at the Cenacle, 693 East Ave., on the last Monday of each month for Retreat League members. The next of these special masses is scheduled for 5 p.m. April 26.

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HER COFFIN: THE GARBAGE CAN

THE HOLY FATHER'S MISSION AID TO THE ORIENTAL CHURCH

The Sister was moving among the slums of a city in India. Unbelievably, she heard sobbing coming from a trash barrel. Brushing aside the flies and the vermin, she looked. Beneath the filth and debris was an old lady crying from tearless eyes as her life slowly ebbed away. Tenderly the Sister lifted her, placed her on her shoulders and took her to the Hospice for the Dying. Before she died, the old lady told the Sister, "I'm not crying because I was in the garbage. I'm crying because my son put me there. He had to. There was not enough food for the family." Tragically, this scene will be replayed many more times. But you can help to lessen it. Will you? Here is how.

HOW MANY MORE?

WILL YOU HELP?

- In the hands of our native Sisters your gift in any amount (\$100, \$75, \$50, \$25, \$10, \$5, \$2, \$1) will fill empty stomachs with rice, fish, milk, vegetables.
- Our priests can start a model farm for their parishioners and teach them how to increase their crop production for only \$975. We will tell you where it is located.
- \$15 a month will enable an aged person to spend his or her declining years with simple dignity cared for by our Sisters.

REMINDER

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Nazareth's Poet Offers Performance

Francesca Guli, poet-in-residence at Nazareth College, will give a poetry performance in celebration of the publication of her new book of poetry, *The Hollow Madonna*. Her sixth published book, the collection is described as "a modern love story in poetry." The performance will take place at 8:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 28 in the Nazareth Arts Center Auditorium. There is no admission charge and the public is invited.

Announcing the event, Miss Guli explained that she does not give "readings." She "performs" her poetry, because "A good poem is by its very nature dramatic."

Francesca Guli's work has been likened to that of Robert Frost and

Edna St. Vincent Millay. West Coast poet Cornel Lengyel, has described her poetry as "In tensely alive, charged with passion and compassion, clear, luminous, musical." *The Hollow Madonna*, he said, "embodies the best of this gifted American poet."

Miss Guli's other published books are *I Sing of Summer*, *Be Gentle*, *April*, *Land of May* and *Bitter Lime*.

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CENACLE RETREATS

Father Timothy Curtin, SJ, a theology professor at LeMoyné College, will lead a retreat for Sisters April 23-25 at the Cenacle, 693 East Ave. On the weekend of May 14-16, Father John Walkers, SJ, will give a retreat there for men and women. Reservations may be made through Sister Marie Halligan, RC, 271-8755.

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