

# The Crisis in American Catholicism

By FATHER ANDREW GREELEY

The majority of American Catholics give their religious leadership mixed grades. They reject the charge that priests are self-centered, dictatorial, are not as spiritual as in days gone by. They split evenly on the political and social involvement of the clergy, but only a minority of American Catholics give their priests top grades on such professional matters as preaching, counseling, and working with young people. There has been a substantial decline since 1963 in enthusiasm for a vocation to the priesthood or the religious life for one's own children.

In 1955, there were more than 46,000 priests. Ten years later this number had risen to 58,000, where it remains today despite the fact that the largest age group in the history of the United States has come to an age when priests would be ordained from it. In 1965, there were almost 50,000 seminarians studying for the priesthood in the American Church. A decade later, this number has fallen to just a little under 18,000. There were almost 180,000 Sisters in 1965, but in this group there has been a net loss of 25 per cent, down to approximately 135,000; and Brothers have suffered even more, declining 30 per cent from 12,000 to 8,600.

American Catholics are not classical anticlericals. Only 17 per cent agreed that priests have "lost interest in the problems of lay people and are only concerned for themselves." A substantial majority reject the charge that priests expect the laity to be followers and not leaders.

But only 40 per cent agree that priests do an excellent job of pastoral counseling, and only 20 per cent think that Sunday sermons are excellent, a decline of almost 30 percentage points since this question was first asked in 1952.

The reaction of Catholics to sermons is even worse if one looks at some special population groups. Only 11 per cent of those who attended college think that sermons are excellent, and only 7 per cent of those who attend Catholic

**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.

colleges make the same judgment. Priests, it would seem, are not judged to be selfish or unreligious or dictatorial; but professionally they do not seem to measure up to their laity's standard of excellence.

Thirty-two per cent of American Catholics have a great deal of sympathy for those who have left the priesthood. Forty per cent have at least some sympathy for them, while only 17 per cent have no sympathy at all. Eighty per cent of the Catholic laity could accept a married clergy, and 65 per cent are in favor of a married clergy. A little under one third are willing to support the ordination of women.

But the most serious sign of problems ahead for the priesthood is the drastic decline in the proportion of those who say they would be "very happy" if their son would choose to be a priest. In 1963, two thirds of American Catholics agreed to that proposition; by 1974, the proportion had fallen to 50 per cent, putting the priest in the same percentage category as an author and stockbroker, 16 per centage points below that of business executive, and 23 per centage points below that of college professor in the popularity of American Catholics.

But this decline in support for the priesthood is unrelated to any substantial extent to the poor professional performance of the priests, or to the desire for a married clergy, or to sympathy with those who left the priesthood. On the contrary, the entire 16 per centage point decline in enthusiasm for a priestly vocation can be accounted for by the change in sexual attitudes of Catholics, apparently in

reaction to the birth-control encyclical, "Humanae Vitae." Indeed, the NORC computer models show that if it had not been for the decline in acceptance of the Church's sexual ethic and of the authority of the Pope, the Vatican Council would have produced an increase in support for priestly vocations, so that 70 per cent of American Catholics would have been "very pleased" if their son was a priest.

The magnitude of the problem for the Church can be illustrated by considering that group from which so many religious vocations have come in the past, Irish with Catholic school education. (The Irish are 17 per cent of the American Catholic population but have furnished it with 34 per cent of its priests.)

In 1974, there was a substantial positive relationship between attending Catholic schools and support for religious vocations. (Those who went to Catholic schools were also more likely to reject anticlerical charges, but also more likely to give priests low scores of professional competence.) But among Irish Catholics, the relationship was negative. The more years of Catholic school they had, the less they were likely to support religious vocations.

In 1963, 88 per cent of the Irish who had attended Catholic schools for more than ten years said they would be very pleased if their son would choose the priesthood. This was more than 20 percentage points above the national average. But by 1974, this percentage had fallen almost to half — to 46 percentage points, which is less than the national average. Computer analysis shows that this shift can be accounted for completely by the change in birth control attitudes in the last decade of Catholics who have had more than ten years of Catholic school education.

The birth control encyclical, in other words, had turned off that group which for more than a thousand years had produced what everyone had always thought would be an endless stream of priests and nuns. There is no better indication of how acute the crisis of confidence in religious leadership is in the American Church.

## COURIER-CALENDAR

**St. James** — Rosary Society installation banquet, 6:30 p.m. Monday, May 3; church hall; Bicentennial Review by Center Dancers.

**St. Anne's** — Rosary Society installation banquet, 7 p.m. Wednesday, Inn on the Campus, 175 Jefferson Rd.; Father Louis Hohman speaker; tickets from Mrs. Donald Reinhart, 244-2738.

**Holy Family** — Rosary Society installation banquet 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 12; Dandreas Party House, 1713 Lyell Ave.; Sister Joan Mater, SSND, speaker; Reservations by noon Monday, May 10, with Mrs. Joseph Smarsh, 436-0327, or Mrs. George Kohlmeier, 436-4508.

**Archconfraternity of Holy Family** — St. Joseph Our Lady of Victory Church, 9 a.m. Mass Sunday, May 2; breakfast at Holiday Inn.

**Southwest Golden Age Group** — Meeting at 1:30 p.m. Friday, April 30; 34 Monticello St.

**For Senior Citizens** — Open House at Rochester Museum, 657 East Ave., 1-4 p.m. Monday, May 3; Eighteenth annual Spring Fling, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Thursday, May 13; Maple Dale Party House, 1020 Maple St.; details from Louise Fish or Donna Burr, county parks department recreation division, 244-4640, Ext. 11.

**Smorgasbord** — Sponsored by Mother Cabrini Circle, 12:30-3:30 p.m. Sunday, May 2; Montgomery Neighborhood Center, Cady and Olean streets.

**Monte Carlo Day** — At St. Francis Xavier, 316 Bay, 2-6 p.m. Sunday, May 2.

**Fun Night** — Sponsored by Aquinas Parents Association, 8 p.m. Saturday, May 1, school gymnasium.

**Arts and Crafts Sale** — Saturday, May 15, St. Cecilia's, 2732 Culver, outside if weather permits, 9 a.m.-6 p.m.; sponsored by Ladies Guild.

**Antique Show and Sale** — At St. Paul's Episcopal Church, East Avenue at Wick Park B, tomorrow, 11 a.m.-9 p.m.; Friday, April 30, 11-9. Twenty-four dealers, special show of antique Oriental rugs, early American kitchen; lunch in old-fashioned tea room or tavern.

**Arts and Crafts Fair** — Fifty area artists show and sell, South Presbyterian Church, 4 E. Henrietta Rd., May 8, 10 a.m.-6 p.m., May 9, 1-6. Continuous demonstrations by professional craftsmen, continuous entertainment, children's art workshop, lunch, snacks; sponsored by church; no admission charge, free parking, free babysitting.

**Antiques, Arts and Crafts** — Show and sale sponsored by Ontario, N.Y., Rotary Club, Saturday, May 8, Middle School, Ontario-Macedon Road.

**Book Fair** — Sponsored by Genesee Region Citizens League for Nursing, Greece Towne Mall, May 6-8 (Shoppers may have free blood pressure check, courtesy of Heart Association).

**1976 Celebrations** — Flower arrangements, table settings provided by Garden Clubs Judges' Council, May 4, 5, Sibley's Downtown.

**Acting Workshops** — Sponsored by Community Players May 1 and 8 at Playhouse, S. Clinton at Meigs with guest director Shan Covey in charge. Free, open; ages 15 and up; Details: 473-4320.

**The British Are Coming** — Bicentennial celebration at YWCA, 173 N. Clinton, Thursday noon, May 13; lunch reservations through 546-5820.

**Rap and Produce** — Day of discussion, planning focussed on community concerns, 9 a.m. Saturday, May 1; RIT Metro Center, 50 W. Main. Information, Mrs. Jessie James, 262-2729.

**May Day Celebration** — Open house at Genesee Coop, 713

Monroe, Saturday, May 1, 10:30 a.m.-8 p.m. Blue Ridge Country Ramblers, Jeremy Seligman, others, in free concert, 6 p.m.-midnight.

**Autograph Party** — For Rochesterian Ted C. Williams, author of *The Reservation*, in Native American section, Rochester Museum, 1-4 p.m. Sunday, May 2.

**All the King's Men** — Political (1949) film based on Robert Penn Warren novel, 7:30 p.m. tomorrow, Basil Hall, St. John Fisher College. Free.

**Bicentennial Concert** — St. John Fisher College men's and women's glee clubs in program of U.S. "period" songs, 7:45 p.m. Saturday, May 8, Kearney Auditorium; directed by Dr. H. Wendell Howard. Free.

**Early American Comedy** — *The Contrast*, by Royall Tyler, first comedy written by a U.S. citizen, played by entire Geyva company, tomorrow through May 16, 168 S. Clinton. Thursdays and Fridays 8 p.m.; Saturdays 5, 8:30; Sundays 5 p.m.

**Heritage and Horizons** — Lecture series sponsored by West Irondequoit Ministers' Association ends Sunday, May 2, with Rabbi Judea Miller's *The Jewish Experience in America*, 7:30 p.m., West Irondequoit High School, 260 Cooper Road. Free.

**Bicentennial Review and Good Time Festival** — Local talent show with guest stars, 8 p.m. May 7, 8, Greece Arcadia High School; benefit Greece Bicentennial Commission, Charlotte Bicentennial Parade Committee.

**Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra** — Conducted by Isaiah Jackson with Roger Woodward, keyboard artist, 8 p.m. tomorrow, Eastman Theatre.

**Contemporary Arts Festival** — At Roberts Wesleyan College, Palmer Hall; college musicians, 8 p.m. May 6; Rochester Philharmonic Chamber Players conducted by Isaiah Jackson, 8 p.m. May 7.

**Van Cliburn** — American pianist, 8 p.m. Saturday, May 15, Eastman Theatre; tickets as Original Performances, 270 Midtown Plaza Terrace.

**Ekimo Art** — Illustrated talk by David Howard Day, Monroe Community College anthropology faculty, 3 p.m. Sunday, May 2, Memorial Art Gallery. Free with gallery admission.

**Rhine Discovery** — Travel talk by Langdon F. Clay of Memorial Art Gallery staff 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, May 4, at gallery. Free.

**Allous Art Workshop** — Exhibition of children's work through May 15; 7:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 10 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Saturdays, 740 University Ave.

**Muggleton Gallery** — Landscape paintings by Grant Dolge, welded steel sculpture by George Ufford, May 2-21; reception for the artists 2-5 p.m. Sunday, May 2, 7 William St., Auburn.

**Garage Sale** — Cardinal Mooney High School cafeteria, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday, May 1. Sponsored by Women's Guild for Guaranty Tuition Fund. Donations at Eloy Cross Brothers garage anytime Friday.

**Next-to-New Clothing** — Also, general rummage sale, at St. Anne's school basement, behind church at 1640 Mt. Hope, 1-4 p.m. Friday, April 30; 10-4 Saturday, May 1.

**Next-to-New** — Twentieth Spring sale for Harley School, in school gymnasium, 1981 Clover, 9 a.m.-7 p.m. Friday, April 30; 9-3 Saturday, May 1, with 50 per cent price reduction Saturday. Also, bake sale Friday, cook book sale both days.

**Blood Bank Volunteers** — Interviews tomorrow and May 3, 9:45 a.m.-2:30 p.m. for people interested in technical tasks, at Red Cross, 50 Prince, telephone 275-9800.

**Bicycle Races** — Around perimeter of Longridge Mall, Greece, 5 p.m. until dark Sunday, May 2, to dramatize Clean Air Week.

## Life, Liberty and Law



Nancy Murphy

[Fourth in a series]

What is an encyclical letter and what importance is attached to it?

Traditionally, encyclicals are formal letters written by the Pope for the entire Church. They are not used for dogmatic definitions but rather to give counsel or to shed new light on points of doctrine which must be more precise, or which must be taught in view of specific circumstances. (They are) an expression of the Pope's ordinary teaching authority; the contents of an encyclical are presumed to belong to the ordinary magisterium unless the opposite is clearly manifested. Pope Pius XII, stated in his encyclical letter *Humani Generis* (On Certain False Opinions Which Threaten to Undermine the Foundations of the Church): "What is expounded and inculcated in encyclical letters already appertains to Catholic doctrine."

Given the abundance of authentic legislation in the Church today, we must distinguish between what is official and what is simply an individual's views of certain subjects. To avoid unnecessary conflicts and hardships, the first step to be taken to evaluate a pronouncement is to determine its source. (Quotations above are from the Canon Law Society of America.)

In his magnificent encyclical *Human Life* (On the Propagation of Human Life According to the Right Order), Pope Paul VI, stated: "We must once again declare that the direct interruption of the generative process already begun and above, all the directly willed and procured abortion (even for therapeutic reasons) are to be absolutely excluded as a means of regulating births. Equally excluded, as the Magisterium of the Church has frequently declared, is direct sterilization, whether permanent or temporary, whether of the man or of the woman. Similarly excluded is

every action which, either in anticipation of the conjugal act or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, aims at making procreation impossible.

"If there are serious motives to space out births which result from the physical or psychological conditions of husband and wife, or from external circumstances, the Church teaches that it is then licit (permitted) to take into account the rhythms immanent in the generative functions for the use of marriage in the infertile periods only, and in this way to regulate birth without offending the moral principles which we have recalled." (Pope Paul referenced this statement with quotations from Pius XII.)

Less than a year later, in 1969, a group of Protestant theologians and biblical scholars published a paper (*Birth Control and the Christian*) in which they stressed the anti-contraception ethos of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. Acknowledging that the Bible contains no specific condemnation of contraception, at least two of the authors Bruce K. Watke (Dallas Theological Seminary) and Robert P. Meye (Northern Baptist Theological Seminary) point out that with the "two-in-one-flesh" teaching dominant in Genesis, and fruitfulness its greatest blessing, a specific condemnation was unnecessary. They recall too that Christ reinforced the "two-in-one-flesh" concept by making marriage indissoluble, thus adding the spiritual dimension. Both the Old and the New Testaments were written in the context of a general and accepted condemnation of contraception.

Natural Family Planning makes use of the natural phenomena (the changes of basal temperature and cervical mucus) of the human body in order, either to enhance the probability of conception or to avoid it altogether. It is morally acceptable to all Christians. It requires no mechanical gadgets, plastic or metal. No drugs. No pills. It portends no dangerous or unknown after-effects. It is not the calendar-rhythm system. It is a safe, reliable and completely moral method to recognize ovulation (fertility) in advance; the answer to family planning.

And there is nothing artificial about it.

**NEXT WEEK:** Those who teach Natural Family Planning.

## Deadline

Calendar items should be mailed to the *Courier-Journal* Calendar Desk, 67 Chestnut St., Rochester, N.Y. 14604. Deadline is Wednesday noon, one week ahead of the publication date.