



What should be the reaction of the leadership of the American Church to the grave crisis of continued religious decline reported in last week's column?

In any other organization faced with a similar collapse the people in charge would call an urgent meeting and plan for a "crash" response. The officers of the NCCB ought to call a special meeting of the administrative board to consider a plan of research and action to deal with the grave crisis which has been found to exist.

There will be no such response, of course. The culture and structure of the leadership of the American Catholic Church makes it almost physically impossible for them to acknowledge that there is an ominous crisis of decline. The only reaction which the constraints of their position permit them is a reaction of denial. This is not the result of ill will or ignorance; there is simply nothing else they can do but deny there is a crisis.

So let's see some of the dimensions of the crisis which doesn't exist.

**CATHOLIC WEEKLY CHURCH ATTENDANCE**  
(All figures percentages)

Year	All	Men	Women	Under 30	30-45	Over 45	Protestants (all)
1973	47	41	55	34	48	59	29
1975	43	41	46	30	39	55	29
1977	42	35	46	25	40	54	28

Since 1973, weekly church attendance among men has fallen to 35 percent, among women to 46 percent. Among those under 30, it has fallen to 25 percent; for those over 45, church attendance every week is reported by only half of American Catholics. In the meantime there has been virtually no Protestant weekly church change. The crisis—which doesn't exist—is uniquely Catholic (and is based on a data file of more than 9,000 cases).

Another way of examining the non-existent crisis is to look at the proportion which goes to church only once a year or less. More than one quarter of the Catholics in the Country virtually never went to church last year (27 percent). Two fifths of those under 30 did not go to church—almost one third of the those over 45 did not set foot in church.

Think of that statistic for a moment and reflect on the monumental problem for Catholicism it represents: two out of every five young persons who still admit to being Catholic (about 20 percent of the young people who were raised Catholic have already left the Church) almost never go to church. You may write them off as pagan materialists, but they are still the future of the church. What are we doing to get them back? Nothing, of course, for to do anything would be to admit that there was a crisis.

Last week I mentioned that 76 percent of the Catholics would have an abortion (or advise their wives to) if there was a threat to the mother's health. This is not notably different from the Protestant proportion of 84 percent. Similarly, 66 percent of the Catholics and 76 percent of the Protestants would have an abortion if there was a serious threat of a defective child. (Twenty-eight percent of the Protestants and 22 percent of the Catholics would have an abortion if they could afford no more children.) Nor are all the Catholics who will admit that they would have an abortion undevout. Forty-six percent of the weekly mass-goers would abort a potentially defective child and 39 percent would end a pregnancy if there was a serious threat to the mother's health.

I will confess that I was shattered by these findings. I did not think the credibility of the church as a teacher had eroded so far. I'm not certain how to explain the findings except to think that the collapse of the power of the extrinsic arguments has been much more rapid than I would have expected. It used to be that the Church could "coast along" with weak intrinsic arguments for its moral position because it could always fall back on the argument from authority. "This is what the Catholic teaches, and if you're a Catholic, you accept it." That line of argument has not worked so well in most countries for a long time; but it did work here (and in England and Ireland). It doesn't seem to work any more.

Doubtless some wise men and women will console the bishops by muttering profoundly about "secularization"—some mysterious and almost mystical decline in religious faith. Take belief in life after death—doesn't everyone know that such belief is eroding in our "secularist" society?

Forty years ago, the first time such a question was asked on a national survey, 70 percent of the American population believed in life after death. Seventy percent still believe in it. The proportion accepting survival among people over 45 who did not attend college is the same as the proportion among people under 30 who went to graduate school: 70 percent.

For a decline in religious devotion and religious authority there is plenty of evidence, but a decline in religion (fairly enough measured I think by belief in human survival) — for that there is no shred of evidence.

**Death Bill Introduced In State Assembly**

Albany, N.Y. (RNS) — Republicans in the New York State Assembly have introduced a bill to permit the death penalty in 10 circumstances.

It would give juries the right to consider mitigating circumstances in deciding whether to impose the death penalty, and requires a direct review by the State Court of Appeals if a jury votes for the death penalty.

Capital punishment would be permitted by the measure in the murder of a kidnap victim, if a substantial risk of death is created for many persons in connection with a murder, if

a murder victim is tortured to death, if the murder is committed to escape custody or avoid arrest, if two or more persons are killed by the same person, if the defendant is serving a sentence on a prior murder conviction.

Also, if the defendant is serving a life sentence, if the defendant has been convicted of two or more felonies involving the use of a weapon or in which injuries were inflicted, if the motive of the murder is to prevent a witness to a crime from testifying, and if police or correction officers are killed.

**Death Penalty Protest Set**

In a letter circulating through the diocese this week, the division of Social Ministries asks diocesans to join in a demonstration against the current Death Penalty bill now under consideration in the Albany Legislature.

The demonstration is slated for Feb. 7 in Albany, the letter states. Transportation arrangements may be made by calling the Judicial Process Commission of Genesee Ecumenical Ministries (716) 325-7727.

**Stress Justice, Peace, Pope Tells Educators**

Bogota, Colombia (RNS) — Pope Paul, in a message to Roman Catholic educators from some 82 countries around the world who were meeting here, declared that "formation" for "peace and justice" takes on special emphasis in the Catholic school.

The papal message, sent by Cardinal Jean Villot, Vatican Secretary of State, was addressed to delegates of the 10th world assembly of the Catholic International Education office.

The Belgium-based group is the umbrella organization for all national conferences of Catholic education.

Pope Paul said that formation for peace and justice assumed a special emphasis in the Catholic school "through the transmission of the Christian vision of the world — a vision which considers all human beings as members of one family of God, and which therefore affirms the fundamental equality of every person."

Noting that Catholic

schools have the duty to educate their students to "play their role" in the building up of a society "founded on respect for all persons and cultures," the papal message said that the schools should base their teaching on the doctrines "contained in the Scriptures and in the documents of the Magisterium of the Church."

The reason for this, he said, was to preclude the schools from offering "a purely earthly vision, or even worse, a vision deviating from reality and human history."



**Council on Aging**

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proposal calling for the establishment of a Commission on Aging was presented to the bishop. It was accepted and the process which set up the agency began.

Thirteen Commission members, from all over the diocese, were selected and approved. They are: Sister Molly Brown, RSM, Dorothy Dobson, Harry Seeback, Sister Joanne Cullen, RSM, Eleanor Everett (temporary secretary), Msgr. John Duffy, Mrs. Gertrude Webb, Reverend Gordon Curtis, Sister Mary Brigid, RSM, Joan Gallo, Robert Lindner, Sister Kathleen Kohl (temporary chairperson), and Adele Schneider.

Sister Kathleen explained that all commission members have extensive experience in working with senior citizens.

In its two meetings the Commission on Aging has divided the diocese up into three separate "satellites": Monroe County, Southern Steuben, Schuyler, Chenango, Tompkins and Tioga Counties, and Eastern (Wayne, Yates, Ontario, Seneca, Cayuga and Livingston Counties).

Sister Kathleen explained that the satellite format was chosen because each area "has its own unique problems and features." People living in cities, for example, have different problems than those in rural areas.

She said the commission will concentrate on "the larger issues" faced by our elderly, such as forced retirement, Social Security problems, low-cost housing, accessibility of public buildings (including

churches) etc. The satellites will carry out individual programs geared for the elderly in that particular area as well as work with parishes on their own programs.

The commission also plans to work closely with the satellites by serving as an information clearing house and training center for satellite staff.

Some long range goals of the Commission on Aging include raising consciousness in church leadership about older persons, deepen the commitment of the diocese to the elderly, learn to use the expertise and knowledge of our elderly in parish and diocesan programs, and encourage training programs for them.

Maurice Tierney, director of Catholic Charities, who was instrumental in the formation of the commission described its mission. He said that the overall purpose of the commission is to "enhance their (senior citizens) dignity, free them of fear and relieve any limitations they may have." Sister Kathleen added that she hoped the seniors would become "activists" in their own behalf.

The Commission on Aging meets bi-monthly with the satellites holding meetings in between. The next meeting is scheduled for 1 p.m. March 11 at St. Francis deSales Grammar school in Geneva. At that meeting the commission will look into the future structure of each satellite.

**DPC**

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Father John Mulligan announced that the Canon Law Society of the United States will be following the diocese's Selection of Bishops Committee as a pilot program, and that the final position on the committee has been filled by Sister Mary Wintish, RSM, field coordinator for the Vicar of Urban Ministry.

The resignations from the DPC of Father Richard O'Connell, for health reasons, and Richard Rusk, Livingston-Steuben, also were announced. John Balcerak, delegate from the Southwest Region to replace Ernest Curran, who moved from the diocese, was introduced. The DPC also elected Ruth Hauser to replace Curran on the DPC Executive Committee.

**'Experiencing God' Series Offered**

Elmira — Two mini-course sessions under the title "Experiencing God" are being offered at Elmira College by Father David Callan, co-pastor of St. Patrick's and a chaplain at the college.

topic Father Callan will discuss will be "The Anatomy of Religious Experience." On Feb. 9, "Reshaping Your Spiritual Life" will be examined.

Meeting on Thursdays at 7:30 p.m., the sessions are open to both students and members of the Elmira community. On Feb. 2, the

The sessions will be on the second floor of the Elmira College Campus Center on West Seventh Street. Each lecture will be followed by a break for coffee, and then a discussion period.

**PUBLIC HEARING**  
**Child Protective Services:**

Child abuse and neglect concern us all. The Monroe County Department of Social Services will conduct a **PUBLIC HEARING** as part of the planning process for its 1978 child protective services program. This public forum will enable citizens to comment and make suggestions. The hearing will be televised by Channel 21.

**When:** Tuesday, February 14, 1978  
**Where:** Channel 21, 280 State Street  
**Time:** 7:30 p.m.

If you would like to speak call 442-4000, extension 2610 before February 10, 1978 to sign up.

Speakers will be limited to 5 minutes. However, written comments may be any length. Speakers also are asked to submit their statements in writing.

Copies of the proposed CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES PLAN can be obtained from the Department of Social Services Information Office, or from any library branch.

Your participation is encouraged.

**A Community Responsibility . . .**