

Catholic Trends: Winter 2024

Are there bigoted cell groups w/ the FBI that are anti-Catholic? I'm not one to jump on a conspiracy bandwagon as I do put a premium on justifying one's epistemic claims with supporting evidence. Having said that, a recent issue of *The Catalyst* (Journal of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights) raises some very problematic issues in their January-February 2024 issue. It cites what appears to be an anti-Catholic cell group in the Richmond, VA FBI office. In February of 2023 a whistle-blower disclosed a starting memo by that field office, which revealed it was investigating traditional Catholics who allegedly posed a domestic threat to our country.

When the whistle-blower went public, there was a concern that the FBI was not limiting its investigation to "radical Catholics" but mainstream. The FBI did concede, according to *The Catalyst* that "mainline Catholic parishes" and "local diocesan leadership" were selected for investigation.

One could say that the Richmond FBI was an anomaly, but the Special Agent of the Richmond Field Office said that the memo "could be used to inform...other intelligence analysis across the country."

It's important to note, that the FBI Richmond Field Office was not interested in investigating so-called radical Catholics, but the ones on their radar were those who, according to the House Report on the Judiciary were "pro-life, pro-family, and support the biological basis for sex and gender distinction as potential domestic terrorists." The latter would include the majority of Catholics who regularly attend Sunday Mass.

If there is an anti-Catholic cell group within the FBI beyond the Richmond office, that needs to be identified and purged.

Two-thirds of Catholics believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Catholics throughout the United States have the opportunity to participate in a national Eucharistic revival, culminating in a National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis, In July 17-21,2024. The revival was precipitated in part by a disturbing Pew Foundation poll that showed that the majority of Catholics (70%) only believe that the bread and wine are symbols and not the Real Presence of Jesus.

Some have opined (cf. *Church Life Journal*, University of Notre Dame) that the poll was flawed because of the wording that spoke to the physical presence of Christ and not his Real Presence. The CARA Report (Center for the Applied

Research of the Apostolate) published their own survey (cf. Winter 2024 issue) which was worded in a way consistent with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which states, “At the heart of the Eucharistic celebration area the bread and wine, by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, become Christ’s Body and Blood.

The CARA survey asked, “which of the following statements do you personally believe about what happens to the gifts of the bread and wine once consecrated at Mass?

1. Jesus Christ is truly present under the appearance of bread and wine.
2. Bread and wine are symbols of Jesus’ actions at the Last Supper, meaning that Jesus is only symbolically present in the consecrated bread and wine.
3. Neither of the above.

Those who attend Mass weekly or more, 95% believed in the Real Presence. That percentage dropped to 80% who attend less than weekly but at least once per month. 51% of those who attend a few times per year believe in the Real Presence.

So, the Eucharistic Revival can energize our participation in the Holy Mass and hopefully will draw those who are marginally attending to appreciate that the Eucharist is “the fount and summit of our worship.”

“Is the Pope Catholic? Catholic Identity in the Media” was a provocative presentation given by Dr. Matthew Loveland at the annual meeting of RRA+SSSR (Religious Research Assn. and Study for the Scientific Study of Religion) in Salt Lake City, UT in October 2023. Loveland claimed that “Traditional Catholics are frequently very critical of Pope Francis, often expressing concern that under his leadership, the Church is in crisis, and championing priests and bishops they see as working to hold Francis accountable to tradition and Church teaching.”

Conservative Catholics, on the other hand, are less focused on liturgy wars and are much quicker, even reluctantly, to defend Pope Francis because of his place in the Church hierarchy and its history.

While the Catholic population is increasing, Church participation is declining. From 1970 to 2020 the total Catholic population increased by 45% according to the U.S. Religious Census. At the same time, the total number of

priests nationally by 40%. In terms of sacraments, nationally, baptisms declined by 57%, Catholic marriages declined by 78%, and Catholic funerals by 14%.

The Great Dechurching: Why are they going? Prior to Vatican II (1962-1965) about 75% of Catholics attended Sunday Mass; today, that figure has dropped to around 25% as most Catholics are marginally involved with their faith and many have simply dropped out. Why are they leaving? The reasons for Catholics leaving the Church are the following according to a recent book, *Dechurched*:

1. Had other priorities for my time and money—16%.
2. I disagree with the politics of the congregation—15%.
3. I disagree with the politics of the clergy—15%.
4. I didn't fit in with the congregation—14%.
5. I moved to a new community—13%.
6. Faith just wasn't working—11%
7. Scandal involving the clergy in the broader culture—10%.

Newer priests tend to be more ideologically conservative. New findings from a national study of priests (cf. *Insights from the National Study of Catholic Priests*) suggest that the majority of priests ordained since 2010 define themselves as theologically “conservative/orthodox”.

Where do American Catholics get their religious info? 85% of Catholics say that they pay attention to national news. Preferences for news outlets are Fox News at 34%, CNN (25%), MSNBC (14%). Thirty-two percent subscribe to a daily newspaper and 31% receive a Catholic publication other than their parish bulletin or diocesan publication.

U.S. Diocesan Bishops are getting older. In 1965 the average age of a U.S. diocesan bishop was 59 years of age. But that average has increased to 66 years in 2023. All bishops must submit their resignation to the Pope when they turn 75. The same holds true to priests and deacons who submit their resignation to their bishop when they turn 75.

--prepared by *Deacon Jim McFadden*