

# O'REILLY: CATHOLICISM = CHRISTIANITY

During a recent episode of "The O'Reilly Factor" on the Fox News Channel, host Bill O'Reilly commented on the Pew Research Center survey of religion that came out last month.

Here is what O'Reilly said: "The main reason Christianity is on the decline is poor leadership and corruption within the Catholic Church. The priest scandal devastated the Catholic landscape in America."

O'Reilly is not a scholar, and has written nothing on this subject, so he may be forgiven for his misunderstandings. But one does not have to be a social scientist to know that Catholicism is not dispositive of Christianity: In fact, Protestants outnumber Catholics by more than 2-1.

More important, the decline in the mainline Protestant denominations has been going on for a half-century. They are the ones who have been devastated, not the Catholic Church. So blaming the priest scandal for the precipitous drop in the Protestant community is simply absurd. Also, as Bill Donohue recently pointed out, the Pew survey showed that Catholicism has the highest retention rate of any religion: 90 percent of those who identify as Catholics today were raised Catholic. Looks like "poor leadership and corruption" didn't act as a catalyst to bolt.

There are many reasons why Americans are less inclined to be religiously affiliated these days, but not among them are the sources cited by O'Reilly. It is more complex than he realized.