HOW MANY INDULGE?

There are no reliable statistics showing the incidence of alcoholism among American Catholic clergy. Occasionally one hears of confidential surveys undertaken in some Catholic dioceses and religious orders, out of which conflicting reports emerge to circulate in the flow of rumor. Statistics seem to be used more loosely in the study of drinking habits—and of alcoholism—than in any area of social problems (with the possible exception of delinquency and crime.) Some obvious comparisons can be safely made. If Episcopalian and Catholic lay people drink it is to be expected that they condone drinking in the clergy. If Methodist and Baptist lay people have ethical qualms about drinking, they are most likely to condemn drinking in their clergy. It is logical to speculate, therefore, there is more drinking among urban Catholic priests than among rural Protestant ministers.

The complaint that we do not possess reliable drinking statistics on clergy is not meant to imply that there is solid information about people in other occupations. Everybody has heard that physicians drink a lot on weekends, that military officers can hold their liquor like gentlemen, that salesmen and seamen, bartenders and cocktail waitresses, and people in most other occupations (except ministers and priests) tend to do a great deal of social drinking. Here again, and for the most part, we do not have comparative information on drinking and alcoholism across occupational lines. There is some evidence that abstainers are numerous among farm owners, and non-abstainers among professional, semiprofessional, technical, sales and managerial groups.26

The drinking habits, and potential alcoholism, among the Catholic clergy may be viewed from the several specific variables that attach to the career priesthood. The first of these is that the theological and ethical training for the priesthood, as well as the life-style of the seminary, are pointed at a higher degree of religiosity, which tends to be correlated with habitual moderation, if not with total abstinence. Catholic seminaries, like dormitories in Church-related colleges, usually have regulations against the possession and use of liquor in students' rooms, although there may be occasional, or regular, service of beer or wine at meals. Sometimes a seminary faculty member promotes voluntary affiliation in a Catholic Temperance group. While seminary life is probably not as "rigorous" as it once was, the training for sobriety in general would still "prevent the problem from occurring or prevent the problem drinker from remaining in the seminary." 27

There used to be a custom, which seems to have fallen into