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DEAN R. HOGE, 71, EXPERT ON CATHOLIC PRIESTHOOD, IS DEAD

By LAURIE GOODSTEIN

Dean R. Hoge, a prominent sociologist of American religion best known for incisive studies of an aging and dwindling Roman Catholic priesthood, died Sept. 13 Saturday in Baltimore. He was 71.

The cause was stomach cancer, said his daughter, Elizabeth Hoge.

Dr. Hoge's research, published in 25 books, illuminated some of the major trends reshaping American Christianity from the 1970s on. In his book "Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers" (Westminster John Knox Press, 1994) with Benton Johnson and Donald A. Luidens, Dr. Hoge found that mainline American Protestants were losing their historical attachment to specific denominations, switching among Episcopal, Methodist and Presbyterian churches. He examined trends in church giving, how churches influence immigrants and the increasing involvement of Catholic laity in parish life.

For 32 years, Dr. Hoge was a professor at the Catholic University of America in Washington; he was director of the Life Cycle Institute there from 1999 to 2004.

In the fall of 2007, Dr. Hoge was elected president of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. He fell ill with cancer last spring as he was helping to plan the group's next conference. The conference, to be held in October, will feature a symposium on Dr. Hoge's work.

His most groundbreaking studies were those on the Catholic priesthood, said William V. D'Antonio, a sociologist and colleague at Catholic University. Dr. Hoge examined the reasons for the shortage of priests, the challenges a priest faces in his first five years after ordination, the aging of the priesthood and the morale of priests.

"The priest studies point to some of the core problems that are facing the Catholic Church today, such as what are the possibilities of new recruitment policies bringing in the numbers you need if you stay within the traditional male-only structure" Dr. D'Antonio said.

Bernard F. Stratman, a Catholic brother and executive director of the seminary department of the National Catholic Educational Association in Washington, said, "Research is often difficult

for church leaders to receive and it's not always good news, but Dean was determined to tell the truth and name the proverbial elephant in the room."

"The people who paid the most attention were people in the middle rungs of church leadership, in seminaries, lay organizations and pastoral groups who have to tend the flock," Brother Bernard said.

Dr. Hoge also collaborated with Dr. D'Antonio and two other sociologists on four periodic surveys that looked at the changes in Catholic belief and identity in the decades after the Second Vatican Council.

Dr. Hoge was a graduate of the Harvard Divinity School and Harvard Graduate School.

Besides his daughter, Elizabeth, his survivors include his wife of 43 years, Josephine, of Takoma Park, Md.; a son, Christopher Hoge of Kirkland, Wash.; and his brothers William Hoge of Flemington, N.J., and John Hoge of New Knoxville, Ohio.

Although Dr. Hoge's work often focused on Catholics, he was a member and lay leader at the Takoma Park Presbyterian Church for 34 years. "We used to joke that Dean was more Catholic than many of the Catholics we were studying," Dr. D'Antonio said. For his part, Dr. Hoge used to say that he was "49 percent Catholic."