MIDWESTERN MISCELLANY XV

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in honor of
Andrew M. Greeley

PREFACE

Once again an entire issue of *Midwestern Miscellany* is devoted to the examination of the works of a single writer, Andrew M. Greeley, Chicago novelist, distinguished sociologist, Roman Catholic priest, and recipient of the Society's Mark Twain Award for 1987.

Father Greeley was cited for "the ability to define the Midwest, its cities, and its people to other regions, other peoples, perhaps other times . . .;" he was cited for defining "with clarity and grace, our times and ourselves . . .;" and for his commitment "to Church, to people, to the written word and the life of the mind and the imagination . . ." His work is imaginative and intensely human in the language and tradition that Mark Twain has given to the region, the nation, and the world.

Like Twain, he is no transplanted or converted Midwesterner; like his illustrious predecessor Ernest Hemingway, he was born in Oak Park, Illinois. He grew up on Chicago's West Side, and the reality of Chicago permeates his fiction.

We are pleased that Father Greeley has received the Mark Twain Award; we take pleasure in inscribing this issue of *Midwestern Miscellany* in his honor, and we're pleased, too, that his works are receiving the serious attention that they deserve.

DAVID D. ANDERSON

December, 1987

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THE GREELEY PHENOMENON, OR SOME PARISH! SOME PRIEST!

DAVID D. ANDERSON

When H. L. Mencken wrote in an essay entitled "The Literary Capital of the United States," published in the English *Nation* on April 17, 1920, that "With two exceptions, there is not a single American novelist, a novelist deserving a civilized reader's notice—who has not sprung from the Middle Empire that has Chicago for its capital . . .," that ". . . Chicago, however short the time it has him, leads him inevocably through a decisive trail of his talents . . ." he had in mind Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris, Henry Black Fuller, and Robert Herrick. Still on the horizon were Ernest Hemingway, James T. Farrell, and Richard Wright; still more remote were Saul Bellow and Harry Mark Petrakis, any of whom Mencken might have foreseen.

What, one wonders, might Mencken have said or thought of Andrew Moran Greeley? A sociologist, novelist, Professor of Sociology at the University of Arizona, and priest of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago, a man whose "parish is his mailbox," Greeley is a success at each, most recently as a best-selling novelist. Unlike the other Chicago novelists, he gives credit for his successes to

> Celibacy and hard work.
> And maybe a little talent, too.

Born in Oak Park, Illinois, on February 5, 1928, Father Greeley is of County Mayo ancestry and middle-class Irish Catholic Chicago origins, a product of the Great Depression and of New Deal Democratic politics, of St. Angela Grammar School

on Chicago's West Side, where, in Sister Alma Frances's second-grade classroom in the late autumn of 1935, he knew who he was and knew, too, that he would be a priest. He was a product, too, of Chicago Cubs baseball and 1930s radio—Tom Mix, Orphan Annie, Jack Armstrong, Don Winslow—and of the books he devoured to the detriment of his social life and his classroom behavior. "I'm afraid I was a trial to my teachers," he remembers: "Alas, I was too naive to realize that the best thing a bright little boy with encyclopedic knowledge can do is keep his big Irish mouth shut."

Greeley is a product, too, of Quigley Minor Preparatory Seminary (now in the shadow of the Hancock Building where he sometimes lives), a high school for boys who would be priests, to which each day he rode a Chicago Avenue streetcar across the city and back again. At Quigley, Greeley remembers, he experienced the "famed openness, tolerance and liberalism which had been a historical characteristic of the Chicago clergy . . .;" he discovered the world of ideas and the "incredible heritage of American Catholicism;" he learned to write "sentences and paragraphs," and he learned "to appreciate good literature. Newman, Chesterton, Dickens, Scott, Joseph Conrad, Francis Thompson, Gerald Manley Hopkins, Willa Cather, Sinclair Lewis, Thackeray, Wilkie Collins, Churchill, Hawthorne, Melville, Belloc, Dawson: such writers occupied most of my time when I was not at school, or not sleeping, or not playing basketball."

"Slowly," he recalls, "it dawned on me that the Church once was the matrix for all the arts. What ever happened? I began to wonder."

Of more importance, Greeley learned—I suspect at least as much from his reading as from anyone at Quigley—to understand the nature of faith and the substance of his own:

> I came to Quigley with a religious faith as unexamined as it was intense. I learned during those years to examine it candidly and objectively without losing either the faith or its intensity. The pilgrimage from Paradise Lost . . . to Paradise Found is a going forth and a coming back, an exploration of new colored lands (Chesterton) and a return to the place from which he began only to know it once more for the first time (Chesterton first, then Eliot).

When Greeley graduated from Quigley in June 1947, he still knew who he was and where he was going. The solid foundations of his intellect, his faith, his art were laid; he was beginning to understand himself and his faith and the richness of his heritage, and he had begun to acquire a mature understanding of a symbolism that too often remains not symbol but reality. I suspect that in the eighteen-year-old seminarian who entered St. Mary of the Lake Seminary at Mundelein, Illinois, that Fall we should recognize the professor-novelist-sociologist-parish priest of forty years later.

Whether we would have recognized him during those years at Mundelein—or whether Greeley found himself closer to his own personal Grail through his studies there—is, however, questionable. There he found an institution and men unable to deal with human sexuality, their own or that of half the human race, except by denying it; he found intellectual and personal regimentation, and institutionalized dullness of the mind and spirit, a system that was tired and afraid of its tiredness, observing a rote ritual four hundred years old and steeped in stagnation.

And yet Greeley not only did not leave Mundelein, as many of his contemporaries did, nor did he leave the priesthood, as many of his teachers were to do, but he used the system to his own ends and continued his intellectual and spiritual growth. At Mundelein, on his own, he escaped boredom by reading sociology, labor history, philosophy, the newer European theologians never mentioned in class—Congar, de Lubac, and others; their forerunners Rousselot, Gardeil, Blondel; and, curiously, Greeley comments, John Henry Newman. He learned that history—the history of the Church—is not static but dynamic, as is reality, that faith is an act of love, that the defensive posture of the Church has remained unchanged since the Reformation, that there must be reform. More than a decade before his American contemporaries and elders he was seeking Vatican II. On May 5, 1954, he was ordained to the priesthood, at ease with his identity and with human sexuality, a confirmed celibate, intellectually ready not only for change in the Church but for a ministry he could not imagine.

From this point Greeley's story belongs as much to myth as it does to church history or sociology or literary history—myth

compounded of news items and clerical gossip and theological controversies and defiances of hierarchal authority and denunciations by those who disagree with his sociological conclusions without having read them and references to his novels as steamy by those who haven't read them, by the constant public references to him as "controversial" by those journalists striving ineffectually for objectivity.

All this is the public Father Greeley, the Father Greeley who has become a paradox as his life has become a myth by which those who resent Vatican II—or the Church—explain it to themselves, or, perhaps, as they explain themselves to themselves.

Like all myths, the complex myth of Andrew Greeley has in it something of the truth, but beyond it all is a dimension of his ministry—of his post-office-box ministry—that gives him the utmost satisfaction: it is the constantly increasing numbers of those who report having returned to the Church after reading one of his novels. His fiction, like his own personal search, is the story of man's search—his search—our search—for reunion with the infinite. In so doing, Father Greeley explains, with clarity and grace and wit, our times and ourselves to ourselves.

He is committed to his Church, his people, the written word, and the life of the mind and the imagination; he deals honestly and compassionately and courageously with the human problems of our age in all their complexity and confusion. And somehow, he suggests an ultimate human if not ecclesiastical triumph.

And what might Mencken think of Father Greeley as novelist, as reflective of the times and the city out of which he comes and of which he writes? Mencken had championed other, earlier Midwestern Irish Catholic novelists—Jim Tully (1888-1946) of St. Marys, Ohio, and Hollywood, who had been driven from his church by the brutality that provides the substance of much of his fiction, and James T. Farrell (1904-1979) of Chicago and New York, an intellectual and political refugee—or, to paraphrase Greeley, a tragedy of grace refused—and I'm sure that Mencken would recognize the wit, the faith, the determination of Andrew Greeley. And whether Mencken would approve is irrelevant: he would understand.

THE SACRAMENTAL BODY: ANDREW GREELEY'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

ROGER J. BRESNAHAN

I am reminded of the comic strip "Shoe." The perfesser is walking down the road with the priest and asks: 'Heard any good prayers lately, father?" The priest replies that, as a matter of fact, he has: "Lord, give me the wisdom to accept what I cannot change and the courage to change what I can." As an afterthought, he confesses he prefers the short version.

"What's that?" inquires the perfesser.

"Lighten up."

* * *

Andrew Greeley lacks nothing in courage, but it's his own peculiar cross that he cannot lighten up, except perhaps in his novels. He self-image is that of Quixote jousting at windmills: in recounting the more extreme moments of controversy he jokes that he is once more saddling up Rosinante.

Confessions of a Parish Priest is, therefore, an autobiography in which Greeley attempts to set the record straight—to explain his research as a sociologist much misquoted, to explain his intentions as a newspaper columnist much maligned, and to explain the theology behind his novels much misunderstood. Through it all he is probing his own history—his Irish-American ethnicity, his parochial school upbringing, his education and miseducation as a seminarian, his dedication to the Catholic Church despite "that goddamn encyclical," and his inability to ever really leave Chicago.

Greeley's opportunity to make a significant contribution to American Catholicism came when Cardinal Stritch gave him

permission to write, permission which a writer-priest needed in pre-Vatican Council days. Later, Cardinal Albert Meyer gave Greeley permission to study sociology in graduate school and, on his deathbed, to live wherever he chose—with other priests in a rectory or by himself. Meyer's wisdom may readily be applauded, for the reader of *Confessions of a Parish Priest* will discover that Greeley's impatience with "clerical culture" would have made it impossible for him to endure any longer the infantilism under which young curates were then held by their pastors. Then, too, Meyer may have been thinking of the pastors for Greeley has that Irish weakness of never backing down from a fight just because he's outnumbered, outweighed, and outgunned. That was certainly the case when he undertook his survey research of American priests. The news that most American priests were ignoring the birth-control encyclical and had lost respect for the hierarchy hit the bishops like a ton of breviaries, which the priests were no longer using, either. The conservatives like Cardinal Krol and Chicago's Cardinal Cody turned the screws tighter, attempting to hedge in Andrew Greeley's freedom without actually withdrawing the permissions granted years before by Stritch and Meyer. After Greeley's survey that showed most American Catholics had ignored the birth-control encyclical, while they still considered themselves in good standing with church, even his liberal and moderate friends among the bishops couldn't help him.

There were more studies and other battles, all recounted and re-fought in the pages of this autobiography. Through it all are the twin motivations of the Irish-American: to fight the battle that presents itself, and to be well-liked. Thus, Greeley has abhored the practice of selecting mediocre popes and less-than-admirable bishops. Small wonder, that other Irish-American trait, the desire to be well-loved, especially by those we criticize, is so seldom fulfilled in Greeley's life.

Greeley is a product of the old Catholic Church in America. He has championed many reforms, those that made sense. But in his view, the solid traditions of Catholicism have been swept away with the enthusiasm of post-Vatican Council theological and liturgical reform. Or have they? In fact, Greeley's surveys reveal that the stories, images, and metaphors of the old church

have remained alive within the American Catholic laity, even as the theologians have striven to expunge them. The rosary, the stations of the cross, the imposition of ashes, blessing of throats on Saint Blaise's Day, Christ-the-King processions, May festivals, sprinkling of holy water, burning of incense, devotion to the saints, lighting votive candles, wearing of medals and scapulars, holy cards, novenas, pilgrimages to shrines and holy places—these have all been degraded in importance. Yet in the old church they were all sacramentals—occasions of grace.

The American Catholic laity, despite injunctions to the contrary from priests and theologians, continue to find more spiritual sustenance in these metaphors than in the propositions of the theologians. Indeed, Greeley's surveys have shown that the most powerful image for American Catholics is that of the Christmas crèche. Catholics have learned more theology from this one image than from all the propositions of all the theologians.

This is not to imply that there is a schism developing. The average American Catholic, even the well-educated, tends to accept the propositions of the theologians and deposit them in that category of mind labeled "mysteries of the faith," thus freeing the heart and mind to focus on what may be grasped.

Greeley argues that the Church should turn its attention once more to the wellsprings of faith—to the incarnational, which people understand, rather than the eschatological favored by abstract-thinking theologians. To a theology of the sacramental rather than one of the propositional. Such a theology, tracing its roots far back in Catholic tradition, is less dependent upon hierarchical approval than propositional theology.

Though Greeley does not cite it, the encyclical of Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis,* most likely built the foundations for contemporary lay control of their own beliefs. The argument for that, which I shall make in a moment, is convoluted. Greeley says it was the birth-control encyclical of Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae,* that fostered contemporary Catholic contempt of authority in the Church. The amazing thing is that though 85% of American Catholics acknowledge they ignore the Church's teaching on sexual ethics, they have chosen to remain Catholics. Greeley has developed a theory of religious imagination which has enabled

him "to demonstrate that the critical variable is *how people imagine God.* Those who reject the Church's sexual ethic and nonetheless have an image of God as kind, gentle and loving are the ones who are most likely to go to Mass and Communion. The laity justify their continued reception of the sacraments despite the violation of the Papal birth-control teaching by an appeal from the Church to God. The Pope might not understand the importance of sex in their marriage, the laity are saying in effect, but the loving God does. The official Church has caught itself in a bind in which the laity think that God is on their side and not on the side of Papal teaching." (342-343)

How could this be, given the doctrine of papal infallibility? The answer, I think, is in three parts. First, papal infallibility was a doctrine proclaimed amidst great civil strife. Though the popes and theologians have reaffirmed it many times, the laity around the world have never been consulted. So long as papal pronouncements have not seemed unreasonable, papal infallibility has remained an acceptable tenet of propositional theology—true, perhaps, but not worth thinking about. That dry-as-dust proposition fell apart when Paul VI enunciated a doctrine which seemed unreasonable.

The second part of the answer has to do with a piece of propositional theology which has had a powerful, uplifting effect on lay people. That is, that the sacrament of marriage is performed by the couple on one another. In requiring people about to be married to participate in the so-called "pre-Cana conferences," the American Church has given this proposition the widest currency. Catholics have been told, in effect, that the responsibility for their marriage, both as institution and as sacrament, is wholly their own. Of course, the birth-control teaching is usually presented at the pre-Cana conference, often by a priest. But remember, Catholics overwhelmingly consider it unreasonable. Their respect for the person of the priest means they will often go along with whatever he says while holding mental reservations. Besides, Greeley's research on American priests showed that they "chose to take sides with the laity" (342), and that "more than 80 percent of the clergy said they would not enforce it [the birth-control teaching] in the confessional and a slightly lower number said they did not believe the teaching was

valid." (295) So with most of the priests soft-pedaling the birth-control teaching, the attractive proposition that the couple themselves administer the sacrament of matrimony has meant that sexual ethics within marriage become, in effect, an area privileged to the couple themselves. Though we may have been offended by his crassness, few American Catholics disagreed with the quip of Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz returning from the Rome food conference: "He no play-a the game, he no make-a the rules."

Finally, what enabled American Catholics to ignore the birth-control encyclical and to go on considering themselves good Catholics was, in my view, Pius XII's *Mystici Corporis,* which took powerful hold on the Catholic imagination in the United States, perhaps because American Catholics had become intellectually mature and were psychologically ready for a democratization of Catholic dogma. Paradoxically, though *Mystici Corporis* reaffirmed the dignity of the lay vocation, lay people were not taken step-by-step through the nuances of this complex document. I would argue that what they absorbed was the powerfully attractive notion that we are all, in a mystical way, part of Christ; and that the Church does not consist of its real estate, or even of the Pope and clergy, but that we are, all of us, equally the Church. That sense of the document, which was all that was ever communicated in sermons, took powerful hold within the context of American democracy. Together with the notion that married couples are themselves responsible for the sacramental nature of their own marriage, and thus of their own sexuality, this widespread, if not wholly accurate, understanding of *Mystici Corporis* accounts for the fact that lay and clergy alike in America have rejected the birth-control teaching, implicitly setting aside the doctrine of papal infallibility, yet continue to receive the sacraments and participate in the life and, ah yes, the governance of the Church.

Andrew Greeley's novels depend heavily on his theory of religious imagination, his notions of the sociology of religion, and his use of story, rather than propositional theology. Thus it is the narratives of the Gospels that exercise a powerful influence on American Catholics—much more than the propositions of the Pauline letters or of later theologians. Not that Greeley would

make out propositional theology to be wrong, but only that it gains life with the kind of story theology that forms the more familiar episodes of the Catholic tradition and informs Greeley's own novels.

"Religion," Greeley tells us, "is an utterly secular experience in that it begins, first of all, in the ordinary events of life which renew our hope." (433) Within the traditions of the Yahwehistic religions—Judaism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism—there are differing images which renew hope. Religion for Greeley, therefore, is story before it is theology. He presents a living Catholic tradition as sacramental. Thus, God is disclosed "in the people, objects, and events of ordinary life." (435) Unlike Jews, Protestants, and Muslims, Catholics are not worried about slipping over into idolatry. God is not banished from the Catholic world, and so the world becomes a sacred place. "The quintessential Protestant says that the only sacrament we have is Jesus and him crucified; the quintessential Catholic says that while the crucified and risen Savior is the central sacrament, everything else is capable of becoming a sacrament. 'All is Grace.' " (436)

Greeley's vision is, therefore, a sacramental one. Those who have criticized the covers of his novels as lurid and their content as lewd miss the point. These "comedies of grace" baptize the objects of the natural world, making them sacramentals. Thus my title: the sacramental body. The human body is not an occasion of sin, as taught by the heretical Jansenists of the 17th and 18th centuries, but rather a sacramental, an occasion of grace. "This flesh-affirming, life-affirming version of the Grail legend is Catholic; the life-denying, flesh-denying Arthur/Lancelot version is Manichean." (436)

Thus, in his novels, as in *The Mary Myth* and the book written by him and his sister, *How to Save the Catholic Church,* Greeley reaffirms the "traditional imaginative heritage" of the Catholic Church—"its vast and rich repertoire of experience, symbol, story and community." (437) He does not seek a return to the recent, pre-Vatican Council past characterized by the Latin Mass and the absolute power of the hierarchy. Rather, he seeks to enrich the Church of today with the older traditions: "Hopkins in the nineteenth century, Rubens in the sixteenth century, Michelangelo in the fifteenth, Aquinas and Dante in the thirteenth, Anselm and Bernard in the twelfth . . ." (437-438)

What will all this return to Catholic tradition mean for the ecumenical movement? Greeley doesn't address this issue. Perhaps he is gun-shy after being set up by the American Jewish Committee and then accused of anti-Semitism. Perhaps, indeed, Andrew Greeley has learned that hardest of lessons for the Irish—how to walk away from a fight. Certainly ecumenism has brought Protestants and Catholics closer by eliminating the recriminations born of mutual distrust. But it has also resulted in Catholics stripping their Churches of much that is right in metaphor. To approach the quintessentially Protestant ideal, much that is quintessentially Catholic has been suppressed. To take one example: the realistic, often multi-colored, stations of the cross, which enabled Catholics to meditate upon the story theology of Christ's passion, have generally been replaced in Catholic churches by starkly beautiful, stylized tableau that fail to move us.

When the goal of ecumenism is to enable us to explore the metaphors of one another's traditions, then I would judge Greeley will fully approve. But if the goal is to obliterate meaningful traditions in order to eliminate theological differences, then the Greeley that comes forth so strongly in this autobiography will not assent. For his goal is to reaffirm a sacramental view of the universe. It is a heritage too rich, he says, to ignore. Despite the fact that it has often been served up in the most "shallow and superficial" manner, Greeley's opinion research shows it has remained alive "in the experiential dimensions of the personality of the faithful" which has resulted in a finding that "Catholics were a third of a standard deviation higher than Protestants on a scale which measured the intimacy and affection of their images of God." (438)

Many of his readers have said that Greeley's novels have brought them closer to God and enabled them to understand Her. Her? Ah, yes. A significant proportion of respondents have identified God as both mother and father. And the notion goes back very far. St. Bernard, for example, wrote that in contemplation he sucked milk from the breasts of Jesus! Catholic tradition reveals, according to Greeley, many writers "who did call God a

mother (and a lover and a brother and a sister and a nurse and all kinds of relational opposites—based on the marvellous sacramental insight that all human relationships reveal something special to us about God's love)." (438)

The novels, therefore, are themselves sacramentals. And therein lies the aptness of the baffling title of this autobiography: *Confessions of a Parish Priest.* Greeley is not in any ordinary sense a "parish priest," though he does weekend parish work in those places where a bishop will permit him. But as long as Andrew Greeley continues to write novels which might give offense to those who have not read them, Cardinal Bernardin promises to withhold the privilege of performing any priestly functions within the archdiocese of Chicago. The cruellest blow! Andrew Greeley cannot consider anyplace but Chicago home. The point he is trying to make with this title is that his novels are sacramentals. That as "comedies of grace" they are occasions of grace. His parish, therefore, is his mailbox and his parishoners are his readers.

Michigan State University

ANDREW M. GREELEY: ETHNIC HISTORIAN OR SOCIAL REFORMER?

PATRICIA W. JULIUS

Father Andrew M. Greeley is a hard man to contain—or to categorize. His writing style, even when dealing with the most serious subjects, and in the most serious way, is not that of either sociologist or historian. Throughout his writings, Greeley exhibits that wit he speaks of so eloquently in *That Most Distressful Nation.* And he uses that wit in much the same way that the Irish bards he reveres did. For example, after a learned discourse on the complexities of the Irish/English conflict, ending with the comment that England's oppression of Ireland has continued for a long time, he adds wryly and pensively, "a *hell* of a long time." (*That Most Distressful Nation,* 213)

This is not the language we have come to expect of a "traditional" scholar. But it is the language of a man involved. In many ways, I suspect Andrew Greeley has more in common with Vine Deloria than with Oscar Handlin. Like Deloria, Greeley's knowledge of history is considerable, as is his knowledge of sociology, of course. And, like Deloria, Greeley does more than blend the two disciplines: he adds his own vision and sense of logic, compassion, and the consciousness that pretense and pomposity are not only dangerous but, at heart, absurd. Greeley blends social science, history, outrage, and poetry in his advocacy of the fact and effect of white ethnicity.

In *That Most Distressful Nation,* for example, Greeley includes a charming and erudite discussion of fairies, banshees, and leprechauns in a chapter entitled "The Church." This kind of syncretism marks his mind generally and adds layers of complexity to what, in another, would be a straightforward disquisition of

the effect of Catholicism on the Irish "soul." His analysis of the changing position of the Catholic Church, now and in the future, incisive and not always optimistic, takes the form of social (here church) reform. He presents historical background, discusses the growth of the Irish Catholic church in America from the early immigration to the present, and poses questions for the future that, he argues, must be answered. These questions and others of similar nature form the crimson thread which unites Greeley's non-fiction. His is a plea for as well as an analysis of the value of ethnicity now and in the future. His work is full of hunches, impressions and assumptions—but if they are correct, as I suspect they are, they have great value in defining elements of ethnicity which "have made the Irish what they are today." As important, they provide a key to understanding other white ethnic groups.

In the Introduction to *A Piece of My Mind*, a collection of his columns, Andrew Greeley claims, with great good cheer, to be "perverse, contentious, difficult, unpredictable, combative, difficult and outrageous" But there and elsewhere, these qualities are ever employed in the service of logic, accuracy, thoughtfulness, rationality, and love for his fellows. Always, Greeley exercises our intellect. Always, he asks the hard questions. Always, he directs our attention to work yet undone.

In *Why Can't They Be More Like Us*, Greeley writes about "the diversity caused by the immigration of white ethnic groups from Europe to America between 1820-1920" (p. 13.) His basic theme is the importance—and inevitability—of ethnic pluralism—for the people who are directly affected and for the nation itself. And for the next decade or so, he continues to develop that theme. In *That Most Distressful Nation: The Taming of the American Irish* (1972), *Ethnicity in the United States* (1974), and *The Irish Americans* (1981), his plea remains pretty much the same: that while Irish Americans and other white ethnic groups are not totally explained by their heritage, understanding that heritage will help us to understand them and may even help them understand themselves.

In *Ethnicity in the United States* (1974), Greeley wears the hat of a social scientist more consistently than in any other of his investigations into European ethnic groups. Even here, however, his own intellectual diversity is clear. He quotes an Irish

American mother: "I don't have a past," she said. "None of us does and I don't think I can understand myself or my family unless I can rediscover my past" (179). And Greeley writes, in part, to provide her and others like her with a past and, in part, to convince historians and social scientists that white ethnic groups do exist and their existence is a subject worth far more scholarly attention than it has hitherto been accorded.

I suspect there is a kind of national assumption in the United States that white ethnicity has been swallowed up by the whole. That is, that the act of becoming "American" has somehow eliminated the need (or even the right) to retain our ethnicity. Greeley argues, correctly I believe, that whether we recognize it or not, the ethnic element of our characters not only exists but is alive and operating in our personalities and our assumptions—those things we "know" are true, as surely as air and blood.

According to this convention, by becoming "American" we have no longer any need to be Norwegian or Russian or Irish or whatever. Our acceptance of the Myth of the Melting Pot has essentially denied the need to acknowledge our roots. It is, I think, to disprove that myth, to plead for the recognition that to be American does not demand that we give up or deny our own cultural experience that is the message of Greeley's non-fiction. After all, those experiences made us what we are today and, unless we accept that, how *can* we be satisfied? More to the point, unless we *know* our heritage, our "ethnic origins," we cannot be sure in our identity—as individuals or as a nation.

Despite the almost conscious reluctance to admit it—a reluctance shared apparently by outside society as well as the members of the groups themselves—ethnic variations exist in American families. Certainly the nature of the family was changed by immigration. As Greeley points out, "The city replaced the village. The cultural values transmitted within the family no longer reflected the outside world and were not necessarily transmitted within it. The family was no longer insured of its traditional preeminent position in the lives of its members. Children now had to move away from their parents in order to survive and prosper. The new land encouraged independence and 'striking out on one's own'." But the immigrant

could never really leave home: that home and its values and assumptions would influence the "future growth of his children as they made their own ways" (*Ethnicity in the United States,* 157). Now, a century or so later, most white ethnics have made their way in American society. They have—more or less—melted. But, Greeley maintains, they "have lost something in the process." (*That Most Distressful Nation,* 128) Certainly the Irish American mother knew that: and she had identified the nature of that loss. It was her past, her personal history.

Four years ago, at a Celtic Conference at Oxford—an occasion itself not without a certain Irish irony—a scholar from Dublin asked my national origins. When I admitted with some hesitancy that, as far as I knew, my ancestors had been English as least since about 1560, he asked my maiden name. When I told him it was Ward, he glanced triumphantly at his four fellow Dubliners, turned back to me and fairly roared, "Ah, and wasn't there a bard named Ward in the 6th century now. I knew you had to be Irish."

Somewhere there is a connection. And I think the connection is this. Andrew Greeley has spend a good part of his intellectual life writing about the Irish Americans and their need—hence, by extension, the need of other white ethnic groups—to know their history, to have a sense of their own identity in order to understand their place in the present and the future. My friend from Dublin surely had such a knowledge, such a sense. Alas, most of his spiritual relatives in the United States do not.

In many ways, this investigation has raised my own awareness. For example, Greeley cites pollster Lou Harris's report that about a quarter of American people "hold positions which can fairly be described as anti-Catholic." (*The Irish Americans,* 108) I grew up in the South where hatred of "the different" has long been a cottage industry. I attended Catholic boarding schools, listened to diatribes against Germans, Jews, Yankees, and, of course, Blacks. (We all knew the Klan hated Catholics but they hated everybody, even Episcopalians.) Certainly, in my classes on American Minority History and Literature, I have discussed anti-Catholic prejudice in the 18th-19th centuries. Certainly, I have assigned my students to research the anti-Catholicism which discolored the Kennedy candidacies and to reach some

conclusion about what that told us about the state of our union. I had *known* this. But I had not known it was so widespread in 1981. Twenty-five percent! Somehow that number has changed the way I think, changed the things I take for granted. And such a change in his readers is, I think, what Andrew Greeley is really after.

As one considers Greeley's points and arguments and questions, one cannot escape comparison between white and racial ethnics: that is, Native Americans, Blacks, Chicanos, and Asian-Americans. Indians, the only real Americans we have, and Blacks were forced to cede or at least disguise their cultural verities. Technology as well as social forces—a polite term for removal of the Indians and enslavement for the Blacks—operated to destroy their culture, language, and, in fact, their history. Mexican Americans and Asian Americans came late to citizenship, of course, but both suffered from society's assumption of white superiority. But ironically, those racial groups had one advantage. Despite the oppression and contempt of white society, they carried the impossibility of melting into some common pot on their backs—and fronts and sides. Their skin identified them. They might be oppressed, and they were. But no matter how hard mainstream society tried, it could never completely destroy their respective identities. Their existence could not be denied: there was visible evidence of their unassimilated presence, dismissed perhaps, but always there. Forced into common stereotypes, isolated by segregation laws (or custom), racial ethnic groups could maintain, no matter how tenuously or incompletely, some sense of their own pasts.

Greeley challenges scholars to turn their attention to studying the residual effects of ethnicity on the beliefs and behavior and values of white ethnic groups, in an attempt to somehow legitimize their identity. He presents statistical and historical evidence in support of that challenge. And if that were all he did, we could label him "ethnic historian" or some similarly comfortable term, and go on about our business. However, Greeley does much more. In short, he calls for a restructuring of the way we think, and, so, of the society in which we live. In *The Neighborhood* (1977), his premise is that "neighborhoods are a good thing" (xiv), a belief that he has propounded in other places. But

he bases that premise on a social ethical vision which "stresses the organic, intimate, local, decentralized aspects of human life." He maintains "absolutely and irrevocably, that the dignity, worth, and value of the individual person is supreme." (167) And neighborhoods contribute to that "dignity, worth, and value" for the same reasons that our awareness of our ethnic past should. We "can't be free without belonging," we "can't be independent without being secure," and, most important, we "can't go somewhere else unless" we "can go home again." (169) And this vision of the future, this insistence on becoming, elevates Greeley above the easy labels. He is "all of the above"—priest, novelist, social scientist, historian, columnist—but most of all he is a slaughterer of sacred cows, a deflater of overblown egos, a caller of spades. Like Bernard Shaw, he asks not "Why?" but "Why not?" Greeley raises the ceiling of possibility. And in my book, that is what social reform is all about.

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RENEW YOUR PEOPLE, O LORD: ANDREW GREELEY'S PASSOVER TRILOGY

KATHLEEN ROUT

In March of 1986, the *New York Times Magazine* printed part of Father Andrew Greeley's introduction to the new paperback edition of Lloyd C. Douglass's *The Robe* under the title, " 'The Robe' and I: The Making of a Christian Storyteller." There, Greeley explains that it was his experience in reading *The Robe* at the age of fourteen that formed the nucleus of his later inspiration: the desire to convey Christian truth in a manner as exciting and involving as a good narrative can be. The intensity of the experience and the realism of the presentation of the characters of the Bible seemed to him then and now to be the optimum way to present the insights of faith to readers who were beyond the reach of theological analyses. *The Robe* was attacked, as Greeley's novels have been to an even greater extent, because the powers that be in the Church preferred, alas insisted, that the characters be, in Greeley's words, "saints, not sinners in need of salvation," and that the events be inoffensive to even "the most timid of the faithful."

All of his novels lend themselves to criticism of this nature: there are those who believe that any work written by a good person must be about good persons; only G ratings, as it were, receive their stamp of approval. But Greeley does what he does, and he defends what he does on the grounds that he tries to describe the action of grace and the effect of God's love in a world of sinners, Catholic or not, who often fall into despair. An examination of three of his recent novels, which are grouped together as the Passover Trilogy, will serve to illustrate both the grounds of his critics' complaints and of his justifications.

Thy Brother's Wife (1982), *Ascent into Hell* (1983) and *Lord of the Dance* (1984) constitute a grouping in which the major events in each work occur during Holy Week: specifically, *Thy Brother's Wife* centers around Holy Thursday, the day in the Christian calendar when a priest re-commits himself to his vocation, *Ascent into Hell* has various Good Fridays serve to mark the passage of time and the occurence of major events, and *Lord of the Dance* Holy Saturday, particularly the Easter Vigil Mass on Saturday night, which looks forward to the Sunday Masses of the Resurrection.

There is some duplication of characters and themes in the first two novels in the trilogy. Further, while the span of time in each volume covers several years, the dates often overlapping, the Holy Week events are always prominent, especially as they increase or create the symbolism of rising action and dénouement. In each case, an introductory page explains the significance of the Judaeo-Christian season of liberation and renewal in terms most appropriate to that particular novel. The note preceding *Thy Brother's Wife*, for example, specifically mentions that on the first Holy Thursday, while eating the Seder with his followers, Jesus "committed himself to them irrevocably." Throughout the novel, which commences on Holy Thursday in 1951, with Sean Cronin, the young seminarian, experiencing misgivings about his vocation, and ends on Holy Thursday in 1977 with his acceptance, at long last, of God's will for him, the books, or sections, are each preceded by a relevant passage from the gospel of John, including two from the description of the Last Supper. The connection is not always easy to perceive; for example, one can see as ironic his use of the lines, "I leave to you my own peace, I give you a peace the world cannot give; this is my gift to you," (John 14:27) because the chapter opens with the assassination of Martin Luther King and includes Bob Kennedy's assassination, the suicide of a rejected woman and the death of a little boy, as well as the discovery that the mother of Sean and Paul, whose gravestone reads 1908-1934, is in fact alive but locked away.

The Prologue to *Ascent into Hell* begins on Good Friday in 1933, with the main action picking up in 1954. Here, each of the six Books is preceded by Last Words of Christ on the Cross,

beginning with "I thirst" and ending with "Into thy hands I commend my spirit." Each line is a sort of *double entendre* which refers not only to Christ's torment but to a stage in the emotional anguish of the central character, the young priest Hugh Donlon, who ultimately accepts God's will on Good Friday of 1981.

The first two novels are interrelated in that Sean Cronin's and Hugh Donlon's crises overlap in time, although the results are different, and in that Sean is Hugh's superior with whom he must consult at several points in the novel. Each priest's crisis is three-fold: the temptations a normal heterosexual life offers a celibate clergyman, conflicts with the same sorts of incompetent or capricious administrators one could find anywhere, and a questioning of both faith and mission that lasts most of their lives. In Sean Cronin's case, his and his brother Paul's acceptance of their dictatorial father's will that one go into the clergy and the other into politics as the husband of the orphaned Nora who grew up with them is the root of all the later conflict. Paul is willing to marry Nora, although he doesn't really love her, while Sean has been deeply in love with Nora for most of his life, but rejects her for the priesthood because he cannot yet say no to a parent figure.

Sean's most serious crisis occurs in 1966, when he is in his early thirties; weeks after Nora and Paul's tenth wedding anniversary, which they have spent apart, the three of them vacation in Amalfi, "the old threesome," as they call it, back together again. Soon, Paul is called back to Chicago by Mayor Daley, and Sean and Nora's attraction for each other finally has its expression in a brief affair which fills him, at least, with endless guilt. As according to Nora's plan, however, the union produces her 4th child and only son, Mickey Cronin. Over the next few years occur the traumas of book 6 mentioned above, and in the midst of all of this Hugh Donlon enters the office of the now Monsignor Cronin in a chapter from *Ascent into Hell* to tell him that he plans to leave the priesthood in order to marry a nun whom he has impregnated during an affair that would otherwise have ended. While Hugh has repressed his doubts about the marriage, Sean has repressed his doubts about the priesthood; he suffers from guilt over Nora and has trouble with the priests and papacy over the issue of artificial birth control. It is no wonder that he treats Hugh with

acerbity, and that Hugh regards him as "a cold, ambitious bastard." After years of increasing estrangement, in which Liz Donlon and her Christ Commune group of left-wing radical ex-priests and nuns alienate everyone possible and Liz alienates Hugh from his children, Hugh is framed and imprisoned for activities in the Chicago Board of Trade, and he feels convinced that he is also alienated from God, down in the cold pit that is at the very bottom of hell. Ultimately, however, Liz is killed in a plane crash and Hugh is free to recommit himself to the priesthood should he so choose.

Hugh's time in the pit of Hell is his "time on the cross." Whereas Thursday, the day of commitment to the community, dominates Sean Cronin's story about a priest who remains in the priesthood after a quarter of a century of doubt, Friday, the day of Freedom through Forgiveness, marks the days of Hugh's life. Born on Good Friday in 1933, consecrated to God from the start, he finally accepts God's plan for him on the final Good Friday of the novel in 1981, when he realizes he has been forgiven for his sins and has been offered one more chance to accept Maria, the girl he fell in love with and rejected in 1954 because of his mother's plan for his vocation. Hugh is still struggling with his soul that last afternoon, during his audience with Sean Cronin, who agrees both that Maria may indeed *be* God's will for Hugh and also that Hugh is now and ever shall be a priest. "The choice," Hugh is told, "is between active ministry and being a priest in some other way no one has yet figured out" (362).

But Hugh considers himself an ordinary "lost soul," and he finds it hard to accept the message of the hymn Vexilla Regis, sung during the veneration of the cross, which assures us that the lance that pierced the side of Christ released the saving fluid that will wash us free of all our sins. This forgiveness and love has always been the hardest thing for Hugh to accept for himself personally, although he has delivered sermons on it; it is, in fact, the dominant theme of the novel.

Whereas, the *Ascent into Hell* is about one priest undergoing a crisis of the soul that caused him to leave the priesthood, in both *Thy Brother's Wife* and *Lord of the Dance* the priest, Sean, or John, is part of a pair of brothers in which the elder is a politician like Paul Cronin or a professor and would-be politician like

Roger Farrell. Whereas Sean and Paul were joined by an adopted child in the family, (Nora) John and Roger are raised with their first cousin Danny, whose mother was killed by a Mafia hit man when he was four because she asked too many questions about wills and shares in the family business.

There was minor mystery in *Thy Brother's Wife*; Nora takes over much of the family business as well as the Cronin Foundation when her husband becomes more and more deeply involved in politics, and thus stumbles onto the discovery that Sean and Paul's mother, Mary Eileen, is not in fact dead, as had been assumed, but insane. She has been kept in a Catholic nursing home by her husband since her complete breakdown in 1934 following the birth of Sean. His father, it turns out, is not Paul's father, her husband, but a priest with whom Mary Eileen had had an affair; her guilt, her husband's reaction, and her naturally susceptible temperament, caused her to try to kill her baby, after which she lapsed into psychosis.

In *Lord of the Dance*, the quest for a supposedly long dead relative is the mainspring of the action. When Noelle Farrell must write a family history for a high school assignment, she begins to ask some of the questions that got Florence Farrell killed years before, and that will lead to her own rape and beating as a warning to her and to her family. Almost accidentally, through the medium of her boyfriend Jamie's father, Congressman Burns, she effects the release of her uncle Danny Farrell from a Chinese prison camp, where he has been held incommunicado since his plane lost power and went down in 1964, the year of her birth. Danny's appearance precipitates several crises: it is revealed that his plane went down by pre-arrangement through a powerful family member, (his step-uncle, Aunt Brigid's second husband) who feared Danny would kill him as he had been rumored to have murdered his uncle Clancy, Brigid's first husband and the father of John and Roger, for beating her, Danny's aunt and foster mother. It is further revealed that Danny was the husband (first and now *only* husband) of Roger's wife, Irene, and beyond *that*, he is the true father of Noelle herself, who was conceived before he left on his last mission and born early, on Christmas Day. Improbably, Noelle had never been informed of the truth because the whole family had deceived everyone into thinking

Noelle was Roger's daughter in order to cover the fact that briefly, the widowed and disinherited Irene had given Noelle up for adoption and then reclaimed her after she met Roger again while working in California and married him.

Noelle does not have a murderer for a father yet, though; the killer of the violent old Clancy was Uncle Monsignor—John Farrell. Believing his vocation as a priest to be threatened by the revelation of such a crime, the family covered up for him, allowed the rumor to persist that Danny had done it, and got a doctor to sign a certificate of accidental death. John's killing of his father is a convenient way for Greeley to bring up the subject of the morality of killing someone to protect loved ones; not only is John's conscience clear, but so is Danny's when he and Jamie, using German made precision rifles with telescopic lenses, blast the faces off three Mafia chiefs just as they are ready to tee off one lovely Sunday morning.

Lord of the Dance is a mystery because it is about a mystery—the Resurrection of Christ. It begins in the fall of 1981 and ends on Holy Saturday of 1982, at the Easter Vigil Mass. Father Greeley's selection of the Vigil Mass preserves the Thursday-Friday-Saturday sequence established by the first two books, but it also permits him to make good use of the phallic symbolism of the Easter candle and the newly blessed Holy water used only at that particular mass. Saturday is the day set aside to commemorate new life. Throughout the trilogy, he has consistently emphasized the concept of human sexuality as a metaphor of Christ's love for his Church, and here the symbolism and the reality are articulated by one of the characters, the long lost Daniel Farrell, newly reunited with his wife Irene.

We have seen renewal in the novels all along: On the final Holy Thursday of *Thy Brother's Wife*, Sean Cronin realizes that his brother's wife, now widow, Nora, has been the sign of God's love for him all his life, with or without a marriage taking place; he renews his priestly vows with the other priests in the church below, and he will accept the Pope's designation of him as the new Archbishop of Chicago. Hugh Donlon, after following the wrong way ever since he refused to leave the seminary and marry Maria when he was young, sees that she is correct in her conviction that she is what God wants for him, and chooses,

somewhat ambiguously, to marry her and somehow to see himself as a priest as well. His time on the cross ended, he enters an earthly paradise. But the clearest and most sweeping of all renewals is that which takes place in *Lord of the Dance*. Through the events that unfold when Noelle begins to ask the probing questions that no one wants to answer, old secrets are brought to light, suffering and sin are further endured, and ultimately everyone is changed. Noelle, the analog for Christ, is born on Christmas Day, scourged on the Friday of Passion Week when she is beaten, raped and sodomized, avenged in the purging of evil on the golf course on Palm Sunday, and given her due as a leader of song and bringer of grace at the Easter Vigil Mass. All the Farrells were renewed by the events described, we are told, and the novel ends on a stronger note of affirmation and divine love than any of the others, with the singing of the hymn, "Sons and Daughters."

What, then, to return to the case of *The Robe*, are we taught in this trilogy of renewal and rebirth? And why has Andrew Greeley chosen to present the concept of God's love and forgiveness through the unsavory sorts of tales we find here? One might well wonder, after a few of his books, whether most of the priests in the country aren't conducting secret affairs with favorite parishoners, or even their in-laws. The answer, as Greeley takes pains to point out at the end of each book, is that his stories, for one thing, are little worse in their basic subject matter than the parables and stories in the Bible itself, which regularly feature sinners of small or grandiose proportions. He merely develops the potential in those, he would say, into a full-blown modern narrative. But more importantly, he writes about what he sees and knows, and what the modern Catholic writer often sees, as Flannery O'Connor repeatedly pointed out, is a grotesque world full of people who are lost precisely because they worship false gods, are prey to most of the seven deadly sins at once, and choose to violate a handful of commandments if they get in the way of their plans. She usually wrote about Southern Protestants because those were around her; they were what she could render. Greeley's stomping grounds is where the rich Irish Catholics of Chicago live; is that his fault? The point he makes over and over is that much of our suffering is of our own making, the result of our

blindness and failure to understand God's will, while all of the forgiveness is God's, who is often easier on us than we are on ourselves.

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