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Holy Motives for Murder: Religious Subtext in the Crime Fiction of

Andrew M. Greeley

by

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Abstract

In 1985, Andrew Greeley published *Angel and Martyr*, the first of twenty mystery novels featuring clerical sleuth Bishop Blackie Ryan. Greeley chose to use the mystery genre as a social platform. Additionally, he joined the small subset of mystery authors that wrote about religion. As a practicing priest in the archdiocese of Chicago, Greeley came equipped with an insider's knowledge of diocesan practice and politics. He expressed a deep affection for the Catholic tradition and his belief that the Church was capable of renewal and reform. With that premise in place, he set about to expose weaknesses in the policies and doctrines of the Church. In particular, he confronted three controversial issues that routinely arose in the Catholic social sphere: corruption and inefficiency in the Roman Curia, the Vatican's teachings on human sexuality, and the roles of women in the Catholic hierarchy.

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Thesis Abstract—Idaho State University (2018)

Key Words: Andrew Greeley, Catholic Curia, ordination of women, Vatican, Bishop Blackie Ryan, Catholic Church, mystery genre, Archdiocese of Chicago

Introduction

Motives for Murder

In 1985, Andrew Greeley published *Angel and Martyr*, the first of twenty mystery novels featuring clerical sleuth Bishop Blackie Ryan. A fan of G.K. Chesterton and a practitioner of the locked room mystery, Greeley understood the mechanics of traditional crime fiction, yet at the same time carved an unusual niche for himself in the genre. First, Greeley chose to use the mystery genre as a social platform. In doing so, he joined the ranks of such crime fiction authors as Walter Mosley, Carl Hiaasen, and many others whose fiction was designed to confront a broad spectrum of social and political issues. Additionally, Greeley joined a much smaller subset of crime fiction, authors who wrote about religion. Even among this sparse and specialized group, Greeley was unique. Unlike Umberto Eco, Ralph McInerny, Ellis Peters, and others who used Roman Catholicism as a backdrop for their novels, Greeley was a practicing priest in the archdiocese of Chicago and came equipped with an insider's knowledge of diocesan practice and politics.

The Catholic clerical community has a long and rich history of socio-political activism, but Greeley was selective when choosing where to aim his criticism and proposals for reform. Although he took an occasional literary potshot at the Chicago bureaucratic structure and the politicians who had corrupted it, he saved his best reformatory urges for the Church he loved and served for nearly sixty years. Even though his work was highly controversial, Greeley became a noted Catholic novelist with a strong following among the Church's laity. As such, he expressed a deep affection for the Catholic tradition and his belief that the Church was capable of

renewal and reform. With that premise in place, he set about to expose weaknesses in the policies and doctrines of the Church and he did so with ruthless intensity.

Despite repeated condemnation by the Church hierarchy, Greeley had no qualms about revealing where the bodies were buried within the antiquated structure of the Catholic Church. In particular, he confronted three controversial issues that routinely arose in the Catholic social sphere: corruption and inefficiency in the Roman Curia, the Vatican's teachings on human sexuality, and the roles of women in the Catholic hierarchy. While Greeley used fiction to chastise those in power, he also sought to heal the laity—men and women who had been confused and injured by the careless machinations of the Catholic Curia. His writing often explained difficult theological issues such as divorce and remarriage, the problem of evil, and the meaning of the sacraments. Greeley once stated that he wrote “not to educate people, but to illumine them—to give them light” (Greeley qtd in Becker 5). There is little doubt that he also used the pages of his novels as a pulpit in an effort to bring wounded and apostate Catholics back into the fold.

As a prominent sociologist and a staff member of the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center (NORC), Greeley had access to survey data and the skills to analyze it. Focusing his research on numerous issues facing American Catholics—issues ranging from parochial school curriculum to the sexual habits of middle-aged married couples—Greeley used the resulting data to inform and guide his non-fiction and fiction. Reputed to write 5,000 words a day, he published an astonishing seventy-two works of non-fiction (primarily sociological and theological texts), and sixty-six works of fiction, mostly romances and mysteries. By the time he

wrote his first Bishop Blackie Ryan novel at the age of 57, he had already published forty works of non-fiction and six novels, including the best-selling *The Cardinal Sins*.

When Greeley turned his attention to mystery and murder, the reviews were mixed. The *Kirkus Review* of *Angel and Martyr* found the book's narrative to be "repetitious, disjointed, and overlong," but admitted that readers would find it "a bracing complement to such novels as James Carroll's *Prince of Peace* and James Brady's *Holy Wars*" (*Kirkus*). Conversely, the *Chicago Tribune* reviewer found the book's narrative to be "fast paced and wide-ranging," but felt that Greeley's "earth-mother mistresses and lusty wives seem the stuff of male fantasy" (McCarthy). Others found the novel's level of physical and sexual violence appalling. Greeley himself must have questioned the novel's content, because he included a mail-in questionnaire with the purchase of the book. Readers were encouraged to scale-rate *Angel and Martyr* for violent, religious, and sexual content as well as to proffer their response to the character of Blackie Ryan (Greeley *Angel* postscript). Apparently, reader opinions were strong enough to sway Greeley, because, although religious and sexual content of his future novels paralleled that of *Angel and Martyr* the level of violence was dramatically reduced. Many of those surveyed must have found Blackie Ryan to be an endearing personality because he would prove to be enduring as well, becoming a recurring character in nineteen future novels. In the years to come, Greeley would send Bishop Blackie to the top of the best-sellers list again and again.

It is no surprise that Greeley flourished in the world of mystery fiction. He was an unconventional man operating in a genre where convention was negotiable. The mystery genre has had an unwieldy history; a gangly baby who grew quickly into an obstreperous teenager searching desperately for identity—before getting stuck in a difficult and prolonged adolescence.

Even the definition of the phrase “mystery novel” is troublesome. In popular circles, the term is often used interchangeably with “detective fiction, thriller, crime story, or tale of espionage.” In his 1944 essay, “The Simple Art of Murder,” Raymond Chandler insisted on using the term *detective story* because “the English formula still dominates the trade” (Chandler 2). His own work, however, such as his bestseller *The Long Goodbye* was advertised as “a good mystery” by its publisher, the Houghton Mifflin Company (Moss 226). A detective story, (or mystery story, depending on who you ask) can be “cozy, hard-boiled, soft-boiled, procedural” or any permutation in-between.

To further muddle the equation, the genesis of the mystery story is disputed among critics struggling to pin down the history of this meandering genre. In 1946, Howard Haycraft emphatically insisted that Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” was “the world’s first detective story (Haycraft 4). In order to make that claim, however, Haycraft had to meticulously spell out the differences between the detective story and “puzzle stories, mystery stories, and stories of deduction and analysis” (4). He did so in his comprehensive work *Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story*. In one diatribe, Haycraft is particularly intent on chiding those authors who discovered detective stories in “Herodotus and the Bible and kindred stories” (6). In a literary tone that seems increasingly strident with frustration, Haycraft finally resorts to quoting George Bates: “The cause of Chaucer’s silence about the subject of airplanes was because he had never seen one. You cannot write about policemen before policemen exist to be written of” (Bates qtd in Haycraft 6).

One scholar who did find precursors to Poe in “Herodotus and the Bible and kindred stories” is John Scaggs. Scaggs contends that Poe’s detective story is a mere subset of *crime fiction*, a genre with a “much earlier provenance” than “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (7). As

very early examples of crime fiction, Scaggs points to two Apocryphal stories from the book of Daniel (“Susanna and the Elders” and “Daniel and the priests of Bel”), as well as the mythological stories of Hercules and Cacus the thief and Herodotus’s story of King Rhampsinitus. The Biblical story of Cain and Abel is likewise a tale of murder, as is the story of *Oedipus the King*, as set down in 430 BC by Sophocles (9). When Shakespeare wrote *Hamlet*, Scaggs contends, he was writing crime fiction (12).

If the detective novel is a mere subset of crime fiction, the mystery novel is a kissing cousin. In his work *Mysterium and Mystery: The Clerical Crime Novel*, Presbyterian minister and Bible scholar William David Spencer painstakingly researches the term *mystery*, guiding his readers through Hebrew translations of the Bible, the extracanonical books of the Apocrypha, Greek classics, sixth century Ladino texts, early Christian mystery plays, and rites performed by pagan occultists. According to Spencer, the word *mystery*, although occasionally co-opted by the unholy, belongs to the church. It occurs dozens of times in the Christian Scriptures: the will of God is a mystery, as is the love that occurs between a man and his wife and between Jesus and his Church. Those who speak in tongues, speak of mysteries (5). “In a very real sense,” Spencer insists, “the story of Jesus is a murder mystery” (1). Thus argued, in the minds of many like Spencer, enigma belongs to God. But there would be usurpers—generations of men and women who would adopt, contort, and repurpose the concept of mystery with little thought of heaven. For example, beginning in the 1920s, hardboiled detective fiction was a cynical response to the government’s inability to curb organized crime during prohibition. The genre had a well-deserved reputation for exploring the darker, angrier side of mystery.

“People call me the hardest-boiled, toughest-talking Private Investigator in the business,” says Phillip Marlowe in Raymond Chandler’s 1949 novel *The Little Sister*. The cover

of the first paperback edition of the book featured a corpse with an icepick sticking out of its neck (Moss 176). Violent death wasn't the only lure that Chandler used to entice the mid-20th century reading public. A 1957 reprint of *The Little Sister* featured a buxom and scantily clad blond on the cover, eyes closed in an expression that could have signaled anything from ecstasy to exhaustion (177). Regardless of his penchant for associating with the lifeless and the lascivious, however, Phillip Marlowe was endowed with a set of titanium encased virtues that held true throughout the era of the hard-boiled detective story: the good guy needed to come out on top and the working man's version of justice had to be satisfied. The vengeance of God was irrelevant to a man with a gun.

The 1920s and 1930s, often referred to as the "Golden Age" of crime fiction, ushered in "analytic" stories of detection which challenged the reader to discover "Whodunit?" (Rzepka 13). These intellectual exercises were often seen as a game and, as such, demanded fair play. Self-appointed guardians of the genre firmly believed that readers who entered into the crime solving game and engaged with the "puzzle element" of a story deserved a fair shot at solving the mystery with or ahead of the fictional detective assigned to the case (12). One such referee was Willard Huntington Wright, a popular American mystery writer who wrote under the name S.S Van Dine. Van Dine claimed that the detective story was "a sporting event" in which the author must both "outwit the reader" and "hold the reader's interest through sheer ingenuity" (1). He further stated that there were rules that "every respectable and self-respecting concocter of literary mysteries" must uphold. Van Dine's 1928 list of "twenty rules for writing detective stories" included such admonitions as "no willful tricks or deceptions may be played on the reader" and "there must be no love interest in the story." Additionally, there must be one detective, one culprit, and a corpse. There must be no secret societies or mafias because such

“wholesale culpability” is bound to “irredeemably spoil a fascinating and truly beautiful murder” (2).

Andrew Greeley ignored these prescriptions for writing detective stories. He had a clear-cut agenda when writing; a higher purpose that overrode all other considerations. It wasn't that Greeley reveled in breaking the rules of traditional crime fiction: the rules simply became irrelevant. Defying S.S. Van Dine's admonitions against love interests, Greeley's crime fiction invariably contains a romantic subplot that sometimes threatens to submerge the mysterious elements of the novel. Moreover, many of Greeley's characters appear in more than one novel, and indeed often cross over from his romantic fiction to his mystery fiction. Thus, the young couple who fell in love in an early eighties romance, makes a cameo appearance twenty years later, grandchildren in tow. In this way, Greeley creates something even more involved than a love interest—he creates a sense of family.

The crimes committed in Greeley's fiction frequently fall short of homicide, failing to provide the “one corpse” required in Van Dine's view of the successful crime novel. (Indeed, Greeley's Bishop Blackie is often racing against time to save a potential victim of foul play.) Greeley's villains are often members of secretive right-wing Catholic organizations—psychopathic personalities who simply drift back into the shadows at the end of the novel. Thus, left to divine judgment, Greeley's culprits rarely end up in a courtroom or a jail cell. Readers of the traditional mystery no doubt find this counterintuitive and frustrating.

Like any game or sport, the primary purpose of much twentieth century crime fiction was entertainment and escape. Those who took refuge in underground tunnels during the London blitz of 1940, reportedly sought to fill their “raid libraries” with “detective stories and nothing else” (Haycraft vii). In his book *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, John G. Cawelti notes that

“formulaic literature is a most appropriate vehicle for the experiences of escape and relaxation” because a reader finds “satisfaction and a basic emotional security” in a familiar form. Cawelti further concludes that repetition of the reading experiences within that specific form intensifies the sense of pleasure and security (9-10). In many ways, Greeley’s mystery fiction is relentlessly formulaic, a quality that can make it both wearing and comforting in its predictability. Bishop Blackie is a constant throughout all twenty novels; a pudgy little priest in a Chicago Bulls jacket, talking about the wonders of divine and human love. Further continuity is created by the recurrence of certain themes throughout decades of novels—the themes of Irish culture, of Chicago politics, and of the strengths and weaknesses of Church maintained social structures. Andrew Greeley had a lot to say and he’d found the perfect platform.

Greeley was not the first to recognize crime fiction as a potential venue for social change. For those mystery writers who willingly jumped down the rabbit hole of social reform, reality supplanted the fantasy of Van Dine’s “truly beautiful murder.” The tragedy of gruesome war lingered in the mind of Dorothy L. Sayers’s aristocratic sleuth, Lord Peter Wimsey. Chester Himes and Walter Mosley reminded American readers that discrimination and racial hatred will never be anything but ugly. For some who climb onto crime fiction’s social platform, the success of the novel is gauged on the clarity of the activist’s voice, making the corpse as irrelevant as the clues and the culprit. For others, the corpse is one of many as the novel’s perspective pans out on a scene of mass death. In recent decades, mystery novels have been asked to carry the weight of the world. Authors of crime fiction write about issues ranging from eugenics to sexual slavery, from apartheid to genocide. This shift in authorial motivation—from the desire to entertain to the need to engender empathy—signals a change in the expectations of their readership. The movement from cold eyed objectivity to wet eyed sympathy has been anything but subtle. To call

the savage death of a child “a game” is obscene and sane people do not visit death camps and killing fields for escape and relaxation.

Religiously minded writers never fully relinquished mystery to the “guts, gals, and guns” crowd. Nor have they failed to recognize the social platform so readily accessible in the crime fiction genre. A brief perusal of today’s library shelves will reveal a wealth of religiously themed police procedurals and mystery novels. In *The Bangkok Asset*, John Burdett sends Sonchai Jitpleecheep, a Buddhist member of the Royal Thai Police into the Cambodian jungle to stop a demented child killer. I.J. Parker explores the world of the Shinto religion in *The Shrine Virgin* and Eliot Pattison exposes the crisis of the Chinese/Tibetan conflict in his Shan Tao Yun series.

Although religious crime fiction has been around for generations, insufficient attention has been paid to those who tended the fertile ground where mystery and religion intersect. Phillip DePoy’s Fever Devilin sits in the front pew of a Georgia snake-handling church. Tony Hillerman allows readers to watch Native American rituals from the front seat of a Navajo Tribal Police vehicle. Umberto Eco, Ellis Peters, Margaret Frazer, and Peter Tremayne take us inside the cloister and Harry Kemelman ushers us into the Rabbi’s study. Andrew Greeley’s Bishop Blackie, operating from the rectory office of a busy Chicago parish is an important member of this crime solving club. Rather than looking outward from his North Wabash Avenue window, however, Greeley’s clerical sleuth looked around himself at a Church that was faltering under the weight of its own history.

It is surprising that Andrew Greeley’s name is often absent from the table of contents in books about crime fiction. He sold approximately twenty million books—making him “arguably the best selling priest/novelist in the history of the planet” (Allen Pop Culture1). Not

only that, but he is one of the most controversial mystery writers that we are likely to encounter in a study of the genre. How many men who write explicitly sexual novels appear on their dust jackets in a clerical collar or priestly robes? How many priests put their careers and reputations at risk by confronting the Roman Curia in the pages of a best-selling novel—and then repeat that process 66 times? It is precisely this level of controversy, built on Greeley's personality, style, and agenda, that provided the author a unique niche and a narrow but intensely devoted following in the world of fiction. Ironically, however, those same factors, played out against a backdrop of rigid religious orthodoxy on the one hand and anti-Catholicism on the other, has kept Greeley imprisoned within that niche, even years after his death.

“My typical reader,” Greeley told the *National Catholic Reporter* in 1999, “is a Catholic woman in mid-30s, married, college-educated, who doesn't go to church regularly” (Allen *Pop Culture* 7). Surveys included in Greeley's books indicated that, at that time and within that demographic group, the author was succeeding in fulfilling a portion of his agenda. Readers were gaining respect for the priesthood and Church, and “thinking deeply about religious problems.” Within that context, Greeley's audience was able to “better understand God's love and to better understand the connection between religion and sex.” Cardinal Frances George, the then Archbishop of Chicago, applauded Greeley for “re-evangelizing the imagination” and “using fiction to express the faith and mysteries of the faith” (5). Not everyone was so charitable in their assessment of Greeley's work, however. One reviewer for the *National Catholic Reporter* wrote that Greeley's best-selling novel *The Cardinal Sins* (1981) “cried out to heaven for vengeance,” while *The National Catholic Register* decided that Greeley had “the dirtiest mind ever ordained” (2). Not surprisingly, Greeley's problems with the Catholic hierarchy began early in his career. Warned that his tendency to criticize and challenge Church

authority would “shock the laity” and damage their faith, Greeley was told that he “should take a positive attitude toward the church, praise the good things, and be silent about the bad” (Greeley *Piece* 133). Needless to say, Greeley ignored that advice and, although he remained in good standing with the church throughout his life, he was denied the opportunity to pastor a parish, a decision that grieved him deeply.

In 2008, Greeley got his overcoat caught in the door of a taxi and was thrown to the pavement. Severely brain damaged, he lingered for five years. Following Greeley’s death in 2013, Jason Berry, a New Orleans based investigative reporter and longtime friend of the author, wrote an obituary piece for *America Magazine*. “Greeley wore his Catholicism so totally,” wrote Berry, “as to marginalize himself in some quarters.” Greeley was indeed marginalized by his commitment to the Catholic Church, particularly in light of the anti-Catholic attitudes which still pervaded the country at the beginning of Greeley’s career in fiction. A Harris Poll, conducted in 1983, revealed that a quarter of American citizens, particularly those residing in the Northeast, harbored some kind of anti-Catholic sentiment. (Greeley *Piece* 163). Even among Catholics, Greeley was marginalized by a set of controversial beliefs and the willingness to express them.

Many Bible scholars, both Protestant and Catholic, have trouble with Greeley’s theology. Presbyterian pastor William David Spencer sees Greeley as soft on sin, and notes that Blackie Ryan’s God “is delighted to set aside the sexual rules of the Bible in the interest of promoting love” (Spencer 185). Spencer further upbraids Greeley for allowing his crime fiction to cross the line between mystery and fantasy, citing supernatural occurrences (such as poltergeist activity) in four of Greeley’s novels (177). Setting aside religious objections to Greeley’s inclusion of psychic or demonic phenomenon, some readers may well have trouble assimilating fantastical events into a mystery story. It is likely that other critics have found

Greeley's work hard to classify because of the strong romantic themes. With fantasy and romance elements powerfully represented, as well as the overriding presence of a Catholic reformist agenda, it is understandable that many hardline mystery buffs of the previous generation failed to commit to Greeley's version of crime fiction.

In light of the changing face of crime fiction, however, Greeley's work deserves another look. In many of today's whodunits, the line between mystery, fantasy, and romance has all but evaporated. Mystery fans have come to expect a strong social agenda, and would have no difficulty integrating Greeley's beliefs into a story with a plausible plot and a well-developed main character. One would hope that virulent anti-Catholicism has lost some of its edge and that today's readers are interested in exploring faiths other than their own. Many of today's Catholic readers would no doubt enjoy a novel that challenges the status quo or revitalizes a stagnant faith. Others, lost in the shuffle of a busy parish, would be drawn to fictional clergy who are portrayed as both fallible and accessible. Whether or not we enjoy Andrew Greeley's particular brand of mystery and mayhem, he deserves to be rediscovered and recognized for the unique niche he occupied in the world of crime fiction. In a world of ecumenical sensibilities, changing religious boundaries, and shifting gender roles, that niche may even grow.

Chapter One

A Cure for the Curia

Viewed through the eyes of the fictional Blackie Ryan, the pompous wealth and cynical bureaucracy of Vatican City were “obscene” and “creepy,” an “obstacle both to the sophisticated who saw through them, and the unsophisticated, who worshiped them” (Greeley *Smoke* 78). According to Greeley, the ethos of the Roman Curia was as twisted and dubious as the Vatican City real estate it inhabited, bloated with delusional self-importance and full of dark, dangerous hiding places. As Greeley saw it, secrecy—the refusal to conduct its business in the light of day—was the church’s greatest stumbling block. Add to that poor communication, a startling level of ineptitude, and (according to Greeley) the fact that the church was “run by men who would not pass an MMPI test,” (46) it’s astonishing that the Roman Curia can pull off a successful bake sale. Greeley’s criticism of the Catholic hierarchy was blunt, admitted University of Chicago colleague Martin Marty: “He took risks all the time. But he was extremely careful to make sure he had the data... he didn’t just crunch numbers. He interpreted them...and he was never afraid to interpret things very loudly.” Despite his vocal criticism of the hierarchy, Martin added, “there was never any doubt that Rev. Greeley loved the church” (Jensen and Ramirez 2).

As it turned out, neither Greeley’s love nor his loud warnings would be enough to save the Catholic Church from decades of conflict. Following the birth control encyclical of 1968, Greeley approached the American hierarchy with a warning: Pope Paul VI’s heavy handed interference in the private lives of American Catholics was having a disastrous effect on the Pope’s credibility, and Greeley had the survey numbers to prove it. The Church ignored him, even as its authority visibly crumbled. Years before the sexual abuse crisis made it to the media,

Greeley was issuing constant warnings that the subject needed to be addressed. The Church ignored him and his fellow priests openly shunned him for daring to air the Church's dirtiest secret. Unable to garner the attention of the Curia or his fellow priests, Greeley turned to fiction, addressing his readers through the words and thoughts of a fictional bishop.

In 2000, Greeley wrote a Blackie Ryan novel titled *The Bishop and the Missing L Train*. Along with the mysteries of a missing elevated train car and a kidnapped bishop, Greeley used this text to address two issues he saw as critical. Like many Catholics in the wake of Vatican II, Greeley questioned the "wisdom and scriptural validity" of the Church's strict teaching on divorce (Bokenkotter 398). Rigid dogma prohibits divorced Catholics from receiving the sacraments (such as Communion) unless they have obtained an annulment—a judgement from an ecclesiastical tribunal stating that, due to psychological or physical infirmity, their marriage had never been recognized or consummated in the eyes of God. In 1991, at its peak, the annulment court granted 63, 933 annulments in the United States alone (Zeigler 2). In *The Bishop and the Missing L Train*, Greeley condemns the Church's stubborn insistence on withholding Communion from those with broken marriages. The Curia is in error with such a practice, he claims, because "God wants everyone around the banquet table" (145). Likewise, he criticized the annulment procedure as an antiquated judicial process that had resulted in a bureaucratic nightmare for priests and parishioners alike. After delivering a thorough explanation of the Curial position on divorce, remarriage, and annulment, Greeley delivers a concise thesis through Blackie Ryan: "I make no case for the annulment machine, which is an attempt to deal with the pastoral problem that has turned into a juggernaut. If the Pope would permit divorced and remarried Catholics to receive the sacraments, the demand for annulments would virtually disappear" (Greeley Missing L 46).

Greeley's second bone of contention is the Catholic Church's tendency to reassign mentally ill priests rather than treating them. Augustus "Idiot" Quill has been transferred to Chicago to work alongside Blackie in the Cathedral Parish. Quill, however, is a borderline personality whose delusional state causes great upheaval in the parish and in the lives of the parishioners. Throughout the novel, Greeley reminds his readers that Quill's transfer is part of a long-standing pattern: Quill, an embarrassment to the Church officials, has been bounced from assignment to assignment. Readers may remember that this is the exact mechanism that allowed thousands of pedophilic priests to glide from parish to parish. Four years after *The Bishop and the Missing L Train*, Greeley confronted the sexual abuse crisis with a graphic and disturbing novel titled *The Priestly Sins*. Father Herman Hoffman is a recent seminary graduate who witnesses a brutal act of child abuse committed by an older priest. Refusing to be silenced, Hoffman finds himself ostracized by Church officials and fellow priests.

Greeley didn't hide behind the mask of a fiction writer. Rather, his fiction can be seen as a translation of his non-fiction work; a translation destined for a different, but equally important, audience. According to Greeley, he started writing novels "in the belief that America's increasingly literate, affluent, Catholic population represented an underserved market for popular fiction." The author's plan worked: by 1999, Greeley had a core readership of 250,000 with many novels breaking out beyond the core (Allen Pop Culture7). "His parish was his readers," stated Greeley's niece, Laura Durkin, "He wasn't confined to only preaching in a parish church" (Hoopes 3). One wonders if Greeley's supervisors ever saw the irony of their actions. By denying the priest a pastorship of a small local parish, the Curia gave Greeley the time and independence to write—a freedom that allowed him to preach to hundreds of thousands of people.

Greeley's commitment to fiction went beyond publishing statistics and demographics. He believed in the power of stories: "Religion has been passed down through the years by stories people tell around the campfire. Stories about God, stories about love. Practically speaking, your religion is the story you tell about your life" (Leach 2). In his article "The Fiction of Andrew Greeley: The Sacramentality of Storytelling," Michael T. Marsden calls Greeley a *seanache*, the traditional word for an Irish storyteller. "Andrew Greeley is a successful popular storyteller," writes Marsden, "because he believes in the power of the story to transform a person and to connect the person with both the human and the divine through the earthly trinity of storyteller, story, and reader" (144). Not all human stories are happy, however. Like classic fairy tales, many of Greeley's stories pitted everyday people against giants. In Greeley's tales, however, the Goliath is the Church he both loved and loathed and would never leave.

In an article titled "Why I'm Still a Catholic," Greeley writes, "I'm still a Catholic because I was born Catholic, raised Catholic, educated Catholic and like being Catholic. I'll never stop being Catholic, despite the fact that many of the current leaders of the institutional church are corrupt thugs, from the parish right up to the Vatican" (Greeley Why 1). Someone reading this strong statement might assume that Greeley had a blanket hatred for all members of the clergy and Curia. In reality, he worked hard to view them as individuals and had a reasonably good relationship with church authorities (Allen Pop Culture 4). At times, however, Greeley expressed a profound anger toward the institutional church:

I'm angry at the Church because I love it. I began to love it when I entered St. Angela Catholic School on the West Side of Chicago in 1934, loved it when I made my first Communion in the old wooden church...I loved it when I said my first Mass...I will never stop loving it...It is an organized community with a divine mission made up at all

levels of human beings—saints and sinners, idiots and geniuses, the devout and the indifferent, the virtuous and the corrupt...the sensitive and the clueless. It has a rich and powerfully beautiful heritage, mixed in with folk religion, superstition, ignorance, idolatry, intolerance, and hypocrisy—mountains of hypocrisy. (Greeley *Popes* 2005 xviii)

Greeley speaks like a lover besotted by his beloved and determined to be faithful. Being besotted doesn't necessitate being deaf or blind, however. In his book, *Confessions of a Parish Priest*, Greeley discusses the Vatican's tendency to build walls of self-protection disguised in a language of paternalistic condescension. For example, prior to the birth control encyclical of 1968, Vatican authorities argued against a change in the church's standing on birth control because "the Catholic laity would not be able to understand the reasons for the change" (Greeley *Confessions* 337). Greeley, however, argues that the Curia held onto the antiquated birth control doctrine "not because of its internal rationality but as a matter of protecting the authority of the Vatican: if there had been a change in the birth control teaching, "grave scandal would have been caused among the faithful and they would have doubted all forms of Catholic authority" (337). Greeley refused to buy into the argument that questioning Vatican authority would confuse the laity. Rather, defending his decision to openly criticize the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the Church, Greeley pointed to Biblical precedents:

Those who want me to be silent about the weaknesses of church leaders should take up matters...with the authors of the New Testament, who were quite devastating in their descriptions of church leaders. Why are modern popes, cardinals and bishops immune from criticism when Peter and James and John were not? And why must we pretend that the church is without blemish when the author of First Peter said that it was sometimes a fair bride and sometimes a whore? (Greeley *Piece* 133).

Often warned that “hanging out the [Church’s] dirty linen” will shock the “simple laity” and “give comfort to anti-Catholics” (Greeley *Piece* 133), Greeley responded that “we wash our dirty linen in public because that is the only way to get it clean” (Greeley *Popes* 1978 9). He knew instinctively, however, that any successful clean-up job would have to start at the very top of the Vatican’s power structure—change would have to begin with the Pope (16).

Since St. Peter’s death in 64ce, 265 popes have warmed the fisherman’s throne. Of those, 196 came from Italy, making the nationalist element of the papacy obvious (theguardian). Even a cursory scan of papal history will reveal the influence of politics, family money, and nepotism in securing the coveted position. The number of popes who have died violently—murdered by poison, strangulation, beheading, beating, stoning, smothering, and clubbing—reveals that papal contenders weren’t leaving anything to elective whim. Pope Stephen VI was so enraged with his predecessor Formosus, that he had the old man dug up (nine months after burial), dressed up in papal robes, and propped up in order to stand trial for perjury (Klein). The papacy has had its share of secrets—incest, cruelty, corruption, rape, heresy, witchcraft, murder, theft, insanity, debauchery and fornication—but the greatest part of the Church’s history occurred long before the modern media age. Parishioners relied on their priests for updates from Vatican City, updates that were censored to the marrow. In 1870, 800 high officials of the Catholic Curia gathered in Rome and declared the Pope infallible (Corkery and Worcester 135). Although the infallibility clause issued by this ecumenical gathering (the First Vatican Council) applied only to official rulings made on behalf of the church, many Catholics were unaware of this crucial caveat. Thus, generations of lay Catholics would picture the Pope as an earth-bound saint; a holy man incapable of sin or error. It would take nearly a hundred years for this distorted image to begin disintegrating into a more feasible reality.

The second Vatican Council, in session from 1962 to 1965, was held to address the Church's relationship with the modern world. Catholics around the world rejoiced at the Council's ruling that they could now hear the Mass in their own language, rather than enduring long services in antiquated Latin. The same Catholics, however, were stunned when Pope Paul VI released the *Humanae Vitae* in 1968. The encyclical "reasserted the old teaching, prohibited Catholics from using any artificial contraceptives, approved the rhythm method only for "grave reasons," and praised the benefits of abstinence as a sign of "honest love" (Allitt 174). Even a life-long celibate like Andrew Greeley knew it was idiotic to ask human beings to hit the pause button on their sexuality. Greeley predicted, and rightly so, that the encyclical would "be a disaster for the church" (Greeley *Popes* 1978 16).

Prior to *Humanae Vitae*, the typical Catholic "took the authoritarian structure of the Church as a dictate of divine revelation" (Bokenkotter 392). Enraged by Paul VI's encyclical (and no doubt influenced by the liberal atmosphere of the 1960s), Catholics quickly became disillusioned with the autocratic posturing of the Roman Curia. For the first time, traditional Catholics became aware of the Church's pyramidal power structure and began questioning the wisdom of blind obedience to such an organization. In keeping with the times, they "dissented, demonstrated, engaged in Church sit-ins, and made use of the press" (393). Paul VI, however, having anticipated a negative response to the birth control encyclical, had taken pains to protect his ecclesiastical right to absolute authority. Having reduced the attending bishops to mere consultants, he stripped their power to vote, leaving himself to make all final decisions (393). When this political maneuver became public knowledge, Paul VI was heavily criticized for "not behaving collegially" with his bishops. Belgian Cardinal Suenens campaigned for an attitude of "coresponsibility," meaning that the pope would no longer operate independently of the college

of bishops. Thus, rather than being “the man with all the answers,” he would merely be responsible for “creating the environment in which dialogue, research, and constructive criticism were possible.” In this context, Cardinal Suenens argued, answers could be generated “by the gradual process of consent.” Suenens, however, failed to garner concrete support in his crusade for shared power (394). The Second Synod of Bishops, held in October of 1969, made “timid” references to collegiality and collaboration, but in the end, reaffirmed the Pope’s “full freedom to act on his own” (395).

Many historians saw the birth control encyclical as a petty, random act of power-mongering designed to counteract the perceived loss of papal authority during Vatican II. If this was indeed the case, Paul VI effectively shot himself in the foot. Because of the media coverage, Catholic laypeople became aware of the Vatican’s decision making process for the first time. Newly educated in Church history, they began to understand that the decisions that ruled their everyday religious lives had been born of political wrangling rather than divine inspiration. The Church’s absolute authority in “the realm of morality” was seriously weakened (396). The infallible pope was dead.

Although Greeley was grieved to see the church in such turmoil, he rejoiced that the myth of the perfect pope had been toppled so effectively. “The conversion of the Bishop of Rome into a sacred person isolated from the rest of humankind is evil,” Greeley wrote; “...he didn’t have to exercise his office as though he had a direct pipeline to God—which he didn’t. Vicar of Christ, indeed!” (Greeley *Smoke* 78). What makes this statement so interesting is that it wasn’t written about Paul VI following the birth control debacle of 1968. Rather, presented as a random thought of Bishop Blackie, the statement appeared in Greeley’s 1996 novel *White Smoke*, a fictional account of a papal conclave. The novel is a strong blend of dirty politics and right wing lunacy.

If Greeley's 250, 000 core readers had any lingering doubts about papal infallibility, the many twists and turns of *White Smoke* assured them that the holy image of the Roman Curia was built on smoke—and mirrors.

Cardinal Sean Cronin, the archbishop of Chicago, (and Blackie Ryan's boss) has traveled to Rome to vote in the upcoming papal election. "Their god-damn spies are everywhere!" mutters Cronin (28). He is speaking of the Corpus Christi Institute, a network of ultra-conservative informants that feed information to the Curia:

The Corpus Christi Institute, a rich secretive, and reactionary organization of priests and laypeople that had built up enormous power for itself during the papacy which had just ended—and enormous resentment among residential bishops, who distrusted its independence and often suspected it of being a Catholic version of the Moonies. Not without reason. During the reign of the late pope, Corpus had infiltrated key offices in the Curia. The pope's physician, his press spokesman, and many of his financial advisors were members of Corpus (27-8).

The Corpus Christi Institute is one of two shadowy groups who regularly appear as villains in Greeley novels, the other being Opus Dei (Corpus is fictional, Opus is not). In most Blackie Ryan mysteries, they are the "unseen enemies" that add an air of suspense to a novel. In *White Smoke*, they appear as "shades," lurking in doorways and spying on the press and prelates as they gather to discuss the upcoming election. Beyond fulfilling the enemy role in the novel, the Corpus Christi operatives emphasize the Curia's willingness to seek political gain through questionable means.

Despite his language, rather unorthodox for a Prince of the Church, Cronin is a recurring character in the Bishop Blackie novels and represents the ideal prelate. He is down-to-earth,

intelligent, compassionate, and savvy, which is why Greeley often uses him to explain the inner-workings of the Curia. Most importantly, he's not afraid of "those idiots in Rome" and is rumored to have "engaged in several shouting matches with the pope" (88). In some respects, *White Smoke* reads like a Cold War espionage tale. With Corpus Christi informants strategically placed throughout the Church and community, the Curia has made Cronin part of a police-state. Complaining to a group of fellow Cardinals, Cronin says:

They call me about a homily a young priest preached last Sunday, a comment in class by one of the seminary professors, a remark made at a high school sex course, an unnecessary hysterectomy at a Catholic hospital, an alleged feminist liturgy in a local convent, a penance service at Christmas, a parish where they wash the hands instead of the feet on Holy Thursday. I have to investigate each complaint and then report back that nothing erroneous or imprudent happened. (28)

Cronin's litany emphasizes the petty dogmatism of Vatican officials. Additionally, his frustration with being cast as a Curial puppet sets him apart from other clerical characters in the novel. Readers will trust his voice to help them navigate through the conglomerate of personalities, opinions and activities present in a modern papal conclave.

Sean Cronin and Bishop Blackie are only two of many voices clamoring for attention in *White Smoke*. The novel is like a busy stage play, populated by bit players that serve to represent types. For example, Greeley took great care to describe the departing pope, unnamed throughout the text and currently lying atop a catafalque inside St. Peters Basilica. He had "doubtless been the most gifted pope of the century, maybe the most gifted ever. Philosopher, actor, poet, musician and genius...his tragic flaw was that he really did not trust the Holy Spirit to guide his

brother bishops or the Catholic laypeople” (78). Greeley uses this pope’s death as an opportunity to revisit one of the themes present throughout many of his novels:

No one ever really told him that authoritarianism does not work in most of the modern world. It is not enough to teach, you must also persuade. He could never really understand the need for persuasion. And so his pontificate was a tragic failure. He set out to bring unity to the Church by issuing a steady stream of orders. He divided the Church more than it had been when he started (78).

Compared to the late Pope, Sean Cronin’s choice for papal successor is refreshingly egalitarian. Don Louis Menendez is a Spanish moderate; intelligent, honest, and reluctant to play the Curial game. Menendez is committed to good deeds but politically cautious (Blackie compares him to Rich Daley—high praise in a Greeley novel). Right-wing zealots, confusing his caution with weakness, are convinced that Menendez is soft on abortion. One such character spends most of the novel preparing a sniper’s nest in order to kill Menendez if he wins the election. Inside the Vatican, Curial schemers and puppets such as the Vatican press spokesman, Father Richardson, are terrified that Menendez’s liberal views will result in pluralism, meaning that he will grant decision making powers to local bishops, thus decentralizing the power that Curial leaders had come to enjoy (29). Included in the novel’s cast of characters is wealthy industrialist Timothy Ignatius Williams. Greeley portrays Williams as “a caricature of the successful Irish Catholic entrepreneur (fat, silver-haired, ugly)” and many of his readers will no doubt flash on Tammany Hall (25). By giving Williams, a non-cleric, a place in the power structure of the Curia, Greeley is hinting strongly that “money talks” in the halls of the Vatican. In a previous interview with the *New York Times*, Williams is quoted as saying “We don’t intend to let liberal cardinals like Cronin turn the Church over to socialists, sodomites and secularists” (11). William’s vicious

rhetoric continues throughout the novel, as does Greeley's frequent mention of financial improprieties occurring within the Vatican walls. Luckily, Timothy Ignatius Williams is immediately de-clawed; portrayed as a buffoon who "couldn't lead a pack of hungry vampires to a blood bank" (12).

Greeley employs two veteran media professionals to explain Catholic history and Vatican protocol to his readers. By including copies of their daily articles and broadcasts, Greeley is able to give non-Catholic and lay readers a day by day description of the papal conclave. The *New York Times* reporter adds the voice of a dispirited cradle Catholic, all too aware of the Curia's tendency to engage in cheap theatrics, and tired of the show:

Journalists from all over the world, many of them innocent of any knowledge of Catholicism or conclave, corner the occasional passing cleric, desperately seeking a story that might be called "exclusive." Operatives of the supersecret Catholic "secular institute" Corpus Christi buttonhole journalists and ecclesiastics with whispered stories that attack the character of Luis Emilio Menendez, the winter-book favorite for the next pope, who is still accused of being "soft" on abortion though documents released today by the Spanish College indicate that the accusations are false. (47)

Greeley's Rome is a frantic place, pushed to frenzy by the papal conclave. As journalists scramble for a story and mourners file past the catafalque, the *New York Times* reporter notes, "There are few signs of grief in the rapidly moving line, supervised sternly by the Swiss Guards and papal gendarmes. The latter have responsibility for the miniskirt patrol, which obliges them to turn away women who display too much thigh. What is "too much" is a secret that may be known only by the Deity (47).

Not all of Rome was keeping a quiet vigil, however: “Outside the sala stampa young men and women were passing out handbills with crude cartoons. One of them depicted the late pope throwing gays and lesbians into gas ovens. Another portrayed a crowd of bishops sexually assaulting women. Yet another showed dead embryos scattered in an alley” (42). These two scenes (juxtaposed both geographically and textually) offer a literary microcosm of the modern Catholic Church presented in Greeley’s work. One faction of the faithful, devoid of emotion, are nearly robotic in their observation of ritual and dogmatism. Another faction, a younger subpopulation steeped in pathos, demand a religious experience that is relevant to the critical issues of modernity.

In *White Smoke*, many crucial encounters happen far from St. Peter’s Square. As in many of his novels, Greeley uses quiet restaurant settings to host revealing conversations between friends and colleagues. Here, Bishop Blackie discusses corrupt nuncios (papal ambassadors) with reporters:

“The papal nunciature in America is a lucrative position. The nuncio receives a large stipend from every bishop at whose ordination and installation he presides. One of the men who held the post twenty years ago boasted he returned home a millionaire...”

“How much did you have to pay, Bishop?” Patty asked.

His round, bland face crinkled in a leprechaunish gleam.

“The nuncio informed me that he could come for my ordination...he had heard that my family was not without resources. The stipend would be twenty thousand dollars.”

“And you said?”

“I invited him with all due respect to go jump in the Potomac River.” (68)

This short conversation accomplishes two purposes. It assures Greeley's readers that, like Cardinal Cronin, Bishop Blackie is incorruptible and thus has the moral authority to speak on issues pertaining to their faith. Secondly, it shines light on the papal nuncio, the Vatican's diplomatic corps, and a very powerful layer of the Curial bureaucracy.

The papal nuncio was developed toward the end of the fifteenth century. In the century that followed, when the Protestant Reformation swept Europe, papal diplomats in Cologne, Brussels, Munich, Madrid, and Vienna turned their attention to stemming the tide of Catholic defection. In essence, they were "ecclesio-political spies" charged with guarding the interests of the papacy and reporting their findings to Rome (Hsia 105). Apparently, little changed in the centuries between the Protestant Reformation and the Second Vatican Council. In his attempt to decentralize the pope's power following the birth control encyclical of 1968, Cardinal Suenens insisted that the papal nuncios would have to abandon their long-held role as spies. Suenens recognized that this tight web of informants fed knowledge (and the power gained from that knowledge) directly into the office of the Pope. In Suenens's model, nuncios would no longer be permitted to function as "watchdogs of the Vatican whose job was to keep the bishops of any particular country in line" (Bokenkotter 394). Rather, they would become mere ambassadors and would act as mediators between Rome and the national episcopates of foreign nations. By ignoring Suenens's recommendations, the Vatican left the nunciature network of spies intact. By including Bishop Blackie's brief chat with the media, Greeley levels a second charge against the nunciature: he asserts that the American nuncios have a tendency to sell the privileges of their office. These charges of corruption are particularly troubling in that the nuncios are very close to the papal seat of power. It is this papal seat of power, the now vacant throne of the fisherman, which is being hotly, even violently, contested in *White Smoke*.

When a Pope dies, the Cardinal Camerlengo ritually verifies that death by calling the Pope's name three times without response (although the death is also verified by medical staff). During the interregnum, the Cardinal Camerlengo oversees the funeral and burial of the Pope and directs the election of his successor. The College of Cardinals gathers from dioceses around the world to cast their votes for one of their own. Until recently, the Cardinals were housed in uncomfortable rooms with foldaway cots, ostensibly to encourage a quick vote. They are now housed in hotels, but the conclaves still rarely last more than five days. (McLachlan 2). Seated around the wall of the Sistine Chapel, the Cardinals submit paper votes. When a two-thirds majority is reached, the ballots are burned with chemicals which turn the resultant smoke from black to white. At that moment, the Catholics of the world know that they have a new Pope.

Despite its appearance of quaint ritual and old fashioned charm, however, the papal conclave has a darker side—one characterized by cut-throat politics and high-tech espionage. In 1975, Pope Paul VI made provisions to prevent bugging of the Sistine chapel during future elections. Cardinals are forbidden any contact with the outside world, including phones, newspapers, or televisions. In *White Smoke*, the politics of Greeley's fictional papal conclave are particularly underhanded. The savage traits of Greeley's characters may be hyperbolized for the sake of a good story, but the author understood that bug-sweepers and petty rules couldn't cure human nature. The fight for absolute power in the Vatican will never be anything but vicious.

The ambience of a papal election, notes Greeley, is like that of the U.S. Democratic Convention—one should be prepared for flying mud (Greeley Smoke 47). Conservatives had prepared three ambushes for the moderate Menendez: his supposedly "soft" views on abortion, hints of financial impropriety in his home parish, and rumors of a sexual affair. Proven false, all three ambushes failed, and the abortion charge backfired in a spectacular way. Caught on camera

destroying Menendez's literature at a university lecture, the Vatican press spokesperson, a priest in full cassock, struck a female reporter and called her a filthy bitch—also on camera (152).

Others in the conservative faction floated rumors of an impending schism, should Menendez be elected, and surreptitiously offered a compromise candidate. By threatening schism, these men believed they could hold the conclave hostage—a maneuver that also backfired when it was leaked to the press (161).

Although they had journalists on their payroll, older and more traditional members of the conservative Curia find themselves struggling to win in what had become an all-out media war (105). In an era of the instant political survey, it was becoming more difficult to disregard the opinions of the masses, but Curial representatives brushed away public opinion with an all too familiar paternalism: “[Menendez] is too much of a change from the previous pope,” said Miami Beach's Cardinal Meegan, “...I fear our good, simple laypeople would be shocked by such a different pope... At this troubled time in Catholic history, we cannot afford to confuse people any more than they are already confused” (117-118). Data from an *NBC* poll, however, showed that American Catholics were ready for a change and liked Menendez as a papal candidate. Meegan countered with a statement that *he* had never been interviewed in a survey and “doubted that this one reflected the feelings of ‘our good, devout Catholic laity.’” Andrew Greeley, no doubt remembering the Curia's disregard for his own sociological data, used a *New York Times* reporter to counter with the belief that “good, simple laypeople” were figments of Meegan's imagination.

Not all of Greeley's cardinal electors were Curial hatchet-men. A handful were allied with Cronin in an effort to elect Menendez. Most of the cardinals, however, stood in the middle of the road, trying to decide which way the wind was going to blow. They had been trained by

fear to toe the Vatican party line: “Indeed, all of them wanted to be free of harassment from Rome and from the Corpus spies,” insists Blackie, “But they didn’t want to get caught voting against the Curia if the Curia seemed likely to win” (104). Others just wanted to go home and say that they had backed a winner “from the beginning” (104). A few were portrayed as too dimwitted to make a cognizant choice and, despite the upper age limit of eighty, some of the cardinal electors were hopelessly senile. While *White Smoke* is both entertaining and suspenseful, Greeley’s description of the papal elective process is disheartening. Greeley expresses this succinctly through a fictitious editorial in the *New York Times*:

Those who are not Catholics may well be mystified by the secrecy and the conspiracies that are apparently part of the process of electing a pope. One only hopes that the cardinals in Rome realize how unattractive the process looks from a distance. Perhaps they will learn that the ancient Catholic tradition seems narrow and rigid and even corrupt during the preparations for this conclave. There must be a better way for choosing the religious leader of 900 million human beings.

Greeley’s fictional description of a “narrow, rigid, and even corrupt” papal electoral process wasn’t purely a product of imagination. While the author definitely took dramatic license when creating the spectacle of conclave, his fiction was built on extensive research and experience. The novel *White Smoke*, published in 1996, was most certainly rooted in an earlier time. In the summer of 1975, while sitting on a Lake Michigan beach, Greeley had an epiphany of sorts:

... It occurred to me that Theodore White was doubtless gearing up to write his book on *The Making of the President* during 1976. Too bad, some spirit whispered into my ear, that we don’t have parallel material on *The Making of the Pope*. From the title came the

idea and from the idea in about fifteen minutes a phone call to the publisher, Jim Andrews” (Greeley Popes 1978 10).

From that lakeside epiphany came Greeley’s diary of a papal conclave, *The Making of the Popes* 1978. Although there was no way to ascertain when the next papal election would be held, Pope Paul VI’s failing health signaled that the need for a conclave was approaching. Preparing for an event that could be days, months, or years away, Greeley made a dozen trips to Rome and other European cities, interviewing “cardinals, archbishops, bishops, monsignors, abbots, priests, laity, apostates, pagans, Jews, protestants, and full professors” (10). During these journeys, Greeley obtained enough clippings and research reports to fill several packing boxes, as well as a thousand pages of transcribed notes in the form of a diary (10). The maverick priest from Chicago was ready for the inevitable.

Paul VI’s heart failed on August 6, 1978. After the customary nine days of mourning, 111 cardinals, the largest group of papal electors ever assembled, gathered to elect a new pope. On August 26, during the fourth ballot, white smoke appeared, signaling the election of Albino Luciani of Venice (McBrien 381). Taking the name of John Paul I, Luciani became the first pope in history to take a double name and the first in more than a millennium to refuse crowning with the customary triple tiara. Likewise, Luciani refused to be carried around St. Peter’s Square on the Papal Throne. Most telling of the new Pope’s intentions was his refusal to use the “royal we.” Rather he chose to emphasize the papal role as “Servus Servorum Dei,” Servant of the servants of God (McLachlan 3).

Greeley liked Albino Luciani. Writing from Rome, the author’s diary entries describe a man with a winning smile and easy laugh. According to Greeley, “John Paul’s September was a revolution. He swept away the throne, the crowning...the formal and aloof style of the papacy”

(Greeley *Popes* 1978 162). In short, John Paul I was a people's pope—listening to the voice of the laity and preparing to respond to their needs. According to Greeley, the media accused him of being uncultivated and the Curia was bitter at having lost their puppet (163), but Greeley was delighted with the new pope and hopeful of future change. On September 29, however, thirty-three days after the election of John Paul I, Greeley's diary entry opens with the words "The pope is dead" (175).

Pope John Paul I died in bed, book in hand. Rumors of poison spread, never confirmed or disputed because papal law forbids autopsy (Greeley *Popes* 1978 178). Greeley describes Albino Luciani's public viewing as ghoulish and the subsequent mood in Rome as full of heaviness, lethargy, and a "sense of déjà vu" (177). Greeley's diary notes indicate the author's confusion and pain at the death of the new pope: "...in my notes the day before he died," said Greeley, "I wrote 'we don't deserve a man like this.' I guess we didn't" (177). Greeley speculated that John Paul's brief role was to "present a model of what the papacy might be: the most influential religious leadership position in the world, capable of exercising enormous power, but only on the condition that it shed its outmoded monarchistic trappings" (178).

Karol Wojtyla wept openly as he was elected to succeed John Paul I. The archbishop of Krakow, now to be called John Paul II, became the first non-Italian pope since 1522 (222). Like Albino Luciani, the new Polish Pope refused the archaic trappings of his office and Andrew Greeley's 1978 diary of papal conclaves ended on a note of hope. "We lucked out twice," wrote Greeley. "Whatever else is going to come in the months ahead, we have for a second time a hopeful holy man who smiles, who hugs little children and climbs mountains and waves a crosier like an Alpine stick or a shillelagh" (232). Greeley's hope was short lived, however:

I had high hopes for Pope John Paul II. Because he was an intellectual and a poet, I assumed that he was also a liberal. He had been a liberal at the Second Vatican Council....In fact, like Paul VI, he had lost his nerve. He tried to impose unity on the church from the outside by stern authority. It didn't work, but his marvelously charismatic personality won him the admiration of many Catholics all over the world, who paid no attention to many of his teachings. (Greeley Pope 2005 xxii-xxiii)

Although never named, the pope who lay atop a catafalque in the beginning of *White Smoke*—maybe the most gifted pope ever—learned how to be authoritarian in his native land of Poland.

It is likewise ironic that Greeley's final excursion into the world of white smoke would see Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, one of the Church's most controversial popes, crowned as Benedict XVI. Greeley's second diary of a papal conclave *The Making of the Pope 2005*, ended on an ambivalent note. Greeley was indeed troubled by the storm clouds gathering over Benedict's head, but at the same time, he wanted to shout, "Give the poor man a chance" (227). Silenced by his head injury, Greeley never had the chance to comment when, in February of 2013, Joseph Ratzinger resigned on his own initiative, the first pope do so since 1294.

Chapter Two

Beauty or Beast? The Church's Effort to Tame Human Sexuality

"The pursuit must end," narrates Jenny Carlson, "I am aroused all the time. We must find release, if only for the sake of our sanity. I say to him at supper, I have a naked matron back at my apartment that I must raffle off tonight. He gulps, surprised and pleased" (Greeley *Missing L Train* 113). Despite its mildly salacious imagery and tone, this passage is not from the latest Harlequin romance. It is, in fact, taken from Greeley's 2001 mystery, *The Bishop and the Missing L Train*. An elevated train car has vanished, seemingly snatched from the track minutes before it was due to arrive at Chicago's Kimball terminal. The fact that the L train happened to be carrying an unpopular auxiliary Bishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago when it went missing, brings Bishop Blackie into the riddle.

So, what does a missing Brown Line train car have to do with naked matrons and sexual arousal? The two themes are linked by plot, in that the missing Bishop nearly ruined Jenny Carlson's life by reversing her annulment, thus sentencing her, at least in the eyes of the Church, to permanent union with an abusive husband. Having publicly threatened Bishop "Idiot" Quill, Jenny is later arrested in connection to his disappearance. However, the reader who notices that Jenny narrates a full seven chapters of the novel (with very little of the text relating to Bishop Quill), may perceive that her struggle with the annulment court and the missing Bishop is only one of many threads weaving through the novel. They would be correct. Like many of Greeley's mystery novels, *The Bishop and the Missing L Train* doubles as a love story.

Love affairs are not unheard of in mysteries, despite S.S. Van Dine's admonition that romance has no place in crime fiction (Van Dine 2). Femme fatales and gangster's molls have

been adding sexual spice to the genre for years. Jenny Carlson, however, is neither femme fatale nor gangster's moll. She is a middle aged woman who finds proximity to her male employer both arousing and sexually frustrating. Their eventual love-making is neither sordid nor guilt-inducing, despite the fact that both are active and faithful Catholics. The *Bishop and the Missing L Train* is not a dirty book, but it *is* a book about sex. Despite its subject matter, it is also a thoroughly Catholic book, and its author wears the robes of a priest on its dust-jacket. Nearly fifty years into his career as a priest, Greeley wasn't afraid of the Vatican's futile attempts to silence him. He spoke his mind, particularly through his fiction, and he had a lot to say about sex. More specifically, Greeley had a lot to say about the Vatican's take on sex, which he considered to be riddled with error and thousands of years behind the science of human sexuality.

Throughout its history, the Catholic Church has had much to say about human sexuality as well. It has issued statements, doctrines, opinions, and admonitions on everything from oral sex to homosexuality, from premarital sex to celibacy. For the sake of brevity and focus, however, this chapter will concentrate on heterosexual relationships occurring within the context of the Sacrament of Matrimony. The Catholic Church's stance on the subject of sex within marriage seems nearly double minded. On the one hand, church doctrine insists that couples have "generous" sex lives, procreating without hindrance. On the other hand, the Church has garnered a reputation for shrouding the sexual act in fear and shame. Upon reflection, most theologians would have to agree that the fourth century theologian St. Augustine is at least partially responsible for the Catholic Church's reputation for prudery. Augustine's teachings on sexuality are remarkably complex, but David G. Hunter offers a summary: "Sexual desire, because it operates independently of the human mind and will, became for Augustine a privileged symptom

of the sinful human attempt to assert autonomy against God. The result of the original sin, Augustine argued, was that human beings lost control even over themselves (Hunter 1).

In his 1994 book *Sex: The Catholic Experience*, Greeley writes that, for many Catholics, Augustine's teachings were distilled down to "sex is for procreation and even that is a small sin because it requires physical lust and a loss of control" (20). Stephen Greenblatt's telling article, "How St. Augustine Invented Sex," adds a remarkable twist to Augustine's already remarkable story. According to Greenblatt, working from Augustine's text *Confessions* (written circa 397), sixteen year old Augustine and his father Patricius attended a public bath in the city of Thagaste. Stimulated by the sights in the bathhouse, Augustine had an involuntary erection. Noting his son's erection, Patricius was "over the moon" at the thought of having grandchildren and—in a sort of tipsy glee—told Augustine's mother when they got back home. Augustine's mother Monica, a pious Christian, was horrified and terrified at her son's first signs of sexual maturity. No doubt young Augustine was utterly mortified. As Greenblatt noted, "It is easy, even across a vast distance in time, to conjure up a teen-ager's exquisite embarrassment" (1). Many historians attribute Augustine's stark view of sexuality to either his relationship with the ascetically minded Manichaeism movement or to guilt over a lengthy relationship with a concubine. But could the answer be much more psychologically rudimentary? So many of Augustine's comments about sex revolve around involuntary arousal and losing control over his body. Could his obsession with the loss of physical control have been rooted in the unwanted—yet perfectly natural—erection of a sixteen year old boy?

It is distinctly possible that Augustine's experience at the bath house led him to construct a series of defensive beliefs—concepts that have caused a ripple effect throughout generations of Catholic teachings. For example Greeley states that in the 1970s, the Pontifical Commission on

the Family warned husbands and wives to “beware of the risks of ‘unbridled lust’ in their marriage. Even the Church’s most progressive teachings on sex “emphasize restraint rather than passion, to say nothing of abandon” (Greeley Sex 20). Greeley readily admits that “It is virtually axiomatic that the negative sexual teachings of the Catholic Church interfere with the marital pleasures of Catholic husbands and wives” (19). But, he contends, the High Tradition—the Magisterial and theological Catholicism learned at school—is only part of the equation. The Popular Tradition—the teaching of parents, family, neighbors, and friends—is likely to have much more influence on those growing up in the Catholic faith. The Popular Tradition, according to Greeley is imaginative, experiential, and narrative. It is the Catholicism of the Christmas story and the votive candle. It is “Catholicism in poetry” (21). While Greeley deeply honors the Popular Tradition, he acknowledges that it too can be problematic. Broken parents raise broken children, a phenomenon that he deals with often in his fiction. Likewise, he deals with couples struggling to reconcile the Church’s rigid teaching on sex with what they are feeling in their bodies and in the pleasure centers of their brains.

The Church’s teaching on sexuality cannot be separated from its rigid dictates on artificial contraception. Ardent supporters of *Humanae Vitae* have scrambled to ameliorate the encyclical’s catastrophic effect on the Vatican’s reputation and authority. Unwilling to compromise their position, however, they have remained stubbornly immutable. They have published new philosophical and theological materials in defense of the Church’s teaching on birth control. Funded by conservative groups such as Opus Dei and the Knights of Columbus, Rome has held conferences and opened study centers on the subject. In an especially desperate attempt to solidify their authority in the matter, Vatican officials attempted to have *Humanae Vitae* declared infallible—a doctrine that must be obeyed in order for a parishioner to enjoy full

Communion. Even though this maneuver failed to pass the litmus test of theologians who specialize in Church ethics, critics note that the Vatican has adopted a language of quasi-infallibility when discussing the *Humanae Vitae* publicly (Steinfels 264). Even if they couldn't make it an infallible doctrine, they could pretend that it was.

One of the encyclical's most zealous supporters was Pope John Paul II. Between 1979 and 1981, John Paul broadcast 56 "Audience Talks," on the subject of sexuality. In these lectures, sometimes called *John Paul's Sexual Revolution*, the Pope taught that "the 'nuptial' meaning of the body—its sexual differentiation and its propensity for unity with the opposite sex—is sacramental, that it reveals the propensity of human nature for union in love with God" (Greeley and Durkin, 128). It was a message of great hope for Catholic couples, but it came with a caveat. In order to partake in God's promise of sacramental love, couples had to submit to the Church's teachings on birth control.

"Ask yourself," Christopher West instructs his readers, 'Does masturbation image God's *free, total, faithful, fruitful love?*'" (West 108). The question comes in West's 2004 publication *Theology of the Body for Beginners: A Basic Introduction to St. John Paul II's Sexual Revolution*. As a spokesman for the Theology of the Body Institute in Philadelphia (possibly funded by the Vatican, although this remains unacknowledged in their literature), West has repackaged John Paul's *Sexual Revolution* and travels nationwide to lecture on the deceased Pope's sexual teachings. After his question concerning masturbation, West continues through a list of sexual no-no's in the Catholic Church including "fornication, adultery, [and] homosexual behavior" (108). Finally, West gets to the gist of his argument: "Does an intentionally sterilized act of intercourse between spouses image God's *free, total, faithful, fruitful love?*" It's only then that the unwary reader sees the word "*fruitful*" buried among the other italicized adjectives and

realizes the set-up. West's book, a colorful paperback with smiling young couples gracing the cover, is only the latest iteration of an tired old Vatican dogma: "...each and every act of marital sexual intercourse must be 'open' or 'ordained' to the conception of new life, at least in the sense that nothing deliberate has been done to prevent that possibility'" (Steinfels 256). Another blatantly alluring title is Gregory Popcak's *Holy Sex: A Catholic Guide to Toe-Curling, Mind-Blowing, Infallible Loving.* As it promises, the book delivers helpful hints on foreplay and sexual positioning, but not before delivering hundreds of pages leading up to the message that "sex creates" and "being open to love means being open to life" (151). Popcak warns readers not to skip ahead to the good stuff, thus missing the spiritual side of love-making (sex creates) in favor of a "purely erotic" experience (233). Coupled with an entire chapter on the Church's latest answer to the birth control crisis—natural family planning—Popcak's meaning is a new and slightly racy version of an old message: you can have all the toe-curling, mind-blowing sex you desire with your spouse, but you must be willing to risk pregnancy *every single time* (a process that Catholic couples used to call Vatican roulette).

In truth, no matter how many books are written about "great Catholic sex" and no matter how many ways the Church attempts to repackage *Humanae Vitae*, the dogma is fifty years past its prime. Despite the Vatican's best efforts to counteract the damage done during the birth control encyclical of 1968 there is no going back. The Church will never regain the respect and authority it lost when Pope Paul VI told sixties-era Catholic couples that they still only had three choices in their sexual lives: make babies until their bodies and incomes gave out, play Vatican roulette with the rhythm method, or stop making love. Many of those couples, already enjoying the freedom of the Pill, chose a fourth option. They would no longer allow the Vatican to snoop

through their medicine cabinets or hover above their beds. They simply denied the Church access to their intimate lives.

In 1979, statistics collected by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago revealed that ninety percent of American and Canadian Catholics (between the ages of eighteen and thirty) rejected the church's birth control policies (Greeley *Revolution* 73). Married couples were refusing to fall for the guilt-ridden implication that, because they used artificial birth control at times, they had a "contraception mentality," and believed that children were "a threat to the control and self-fulfillment of adults" (Steinfels 269). The Vatican's spell of papal infallibility had been broken. The Catholic laity no longer believed that the Pope's teachings on birth control sprang from divine prophecy (266). This was further reinforced when Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger) condemned the use of condoms in Aids ravaged sub-Saharan Africa in 2009. Benedict claimed that "condoms were not the answer to the continent's fight against HIV and Aids and could make the problem worse" (Butt 1). The Pope's statement outraged health agencies trying desperately to save the lives of 22 million infected Africans. To his credit, Pope Benedict publicly changed his position eight months later. In an unprecedented "break with the Vatican's blanket ban on the use of contraceptives," he stated that the use of condoms "in certain cases," was acceptable (Kington and Quinn 1). The damage had already been done, however. At a time when Aids and overpopulation were a common social concern across the globe, Benedict's initial willingness to toe the Catholic party line was a well noted public relations nightmare for the Vatican.

Many priests also disagree with the Vatican's teachings on birth control and support a parishioner's right to freedom of choice. A 1994 study conducted by the *Los Angeles Times* showed that out of 2061 responding priests, only 25 percent disapproved of artificial birth

control (Greeley *Wineskins* 123-24). For many of today's priests, now pastoring the children of those who wrestled with the birth control issue in 1968, the issue is all but moot: "In 23 years of talking to people prior to marriage," one priest said, "the issue of contraception has never come up from them. It is absolutely amazing. Not once" (Steinfels 258). Peter Steinfels, a *New York Times* religion correspondent argues that, from the beginning, *Humanae Vitae* was an unnecessary quagmire:

...the question of contraception, although in itself marginal among Catholic teachings, was elevated to centrality by a domino theory concerned that all the principles of Catholic sexual morality would collapse, one by one, if change was accepted on this one point

(257)

In a sense, the Vatican had been right. The issue of contraception did become a slippery slope, but not because it led the laity into a feeding frenzy of rebellion. Rather it was the Church's frantic attempt to power monger that led the laity and lower clergy to create their own reforms. Relieved of the myths of papal and doctrinal infallibility, they were no longer afraid that failure to blindly obey the dictates of Rome would result in eternal damnation.

Andrew Greeley agreed that Vatican II and *Humanae Vitae* were not, in themselves, radical issues, but were only catalysts of reformation. Greeley contended that Rome's power structure shattered because it had been too weak to withstand the smallest tremors of change. More change would come over time—a relaxation in the laity's views on divorce, Mass attendance, masturbation, in-vitro fertilization, and homosexuality (Greeley *Wineskins* 192). The Vatican would continue to issue opinions, threats and decrees on the subject of sexuality, and the laity and parish priests would continue to ignore them. They would continue being Catholic

because they liked being Catholic, but it was a version of faith that Greeley labeled “cafeteria Catholicism”—take what you like and leave the rest (78). They would no longer seek sexual guidance from their parish priests. They would never again invite the Vatican into their bedrooms. In their minds, the Church has nothing relevant to say about sex.

Andrew Greeley, on the other hand, had plenty to say about sex and, judging from his energetic book sales, his readers were willing to listen. In some ways, Greeley’s language meshed with that of the Vatican’s teaching on marital sex: sexual intimacy binds couples together emotionally and is a holy act because it represents the marriage between Jesus and his Church. There was one profound difference, however: there were no caveats in Greeley’s promise of sexual joy. Human intimacy wasn’t purchased at the price of an unwanted pregnancy. Pleasure in the bedroom was not a frivolous byproduct of the holy act of uniting sperm and egg; pleasure in the bedroom was a holy act in and of itself. It is easy to see why Greeley’s fiction appealed to his core readership—young married women with college educations (Allen Pop Culture 7). His novels confirmed their growing belief that they had a right to expect more from marriage than endless diapers and ruined bodies. Greeley’s profound (and repeatedly expressed) respect for women made it clear that they were more than orifices, sperm receptacles, and wombs in the eyes of God.

Greeley operated from a strong set of beliefs about human sexuality, listed succinctly in his monograph *Sexual Intimacy: Love and Play*. Once again, he used his novels to translate difficult religious and sociological concepts to his core readership. Those who have read more than one of Greeley’s novels, in either his crime fiction series or his numerous romantic series, may find his teachings on human intimacy both repetitive and overly didactic. In truth, even Greeley’s murder mysteries are fairly saturated with romantic stories that pointedly fulfill his

vision of healthy and holy human love. If best-seller lists are any indication, however, Greeley's readers don't mind being preached at, especially when the lessons often involve sex scenes explicit enough to raise the ire of conservative Catholics. Barbara Kralis, a columnist for Catholic Online, is not alone in her opinion that Andrew Greeley "makes his living writing steamy, enticing novels that are either an 'occasion of sin' or 'blatantly sinful to read'" (Kralis 3). How would Kralis view Popcak's graphic explanation of why the missionary position is better for achieving pregnancy? If she reviled Greeley's sex scenes but honored Popcak's, where would the difference lie? One key difference would be that Popcak's couples were mating with one eye on a thermometer and another on their next obstetrical appointment. Greeley's characters rarely got pregnant, and if they did, it wasn't out of obligation to the Church's obsession with populating the world with Catholic children. They got pregnant because they wanted a baby and felt the time was right to have one. During lovemaking, Greeley's amorous couples keep their eyes on each other and romp for the pure fun and joy of the experience. Greeley had no problem with a "purely erotic experience." He believed in a good romp.

In Greeley's *The Bishop and the Missing L Train*, Jenny Carlson invites her lover into the shower in a scene of subtly erotic foreplay. "Later, I dry him off and take him to bed," narrates Jenny, "We make love my way. He screams with pleasure and then falls asleep, utterly exhausted" (Greeley *Missing L* 115). Like the vast majority of Greeley's sex scenes, this one is mild by today's standards. It hardly merits the label of "nigh onto pornographic" (Kralis 3), nor does it seem erotic enough to make "readers blush and church superiors fume" (Woo 1). "By the standards of most commercial fiction," wrote John Allen of the *National Catholic Reporter*, "[Greeley's fiction] was fairly tame, but the idea that a priest would pen steamy sex scenes caused outrage in some Catholic circles" (Allen Fr. Andrew 2). Reviewing Greeley's first novel,

The Cardinal Sins for *People* magazine, Michael Ryan agrees that Greeley's sexual scenes are "tepid stuff...never explicit, devoid of profanity and almost painfully shy of anatomical detail" (Ryan 1). At the same time, however, Ryan insists that *The Cardinal Sins* may well establish Greeley as the most controversial priest-novelist since Rabelais. Another Chicago reviewer (anonymous) labeled *The Cardinal Sins* "tasteless and vulgar" (1).

Greeley refuted the charge that his novels are pornographic, stating that they are "less erotic than the *Song of Songs* in the scriptures" (Grobel 174). The language of Solomon's *Song of Songs* is indeed deeply erotic, alluding frequently to the scent and taste of the human body during lovemaking. In the language of *The New Jerusalem Bible*:

My love is a sachet of myrrh
 lying between my breasts
 My love is a cluster of henna flowers
 among the vines of En-Gedi (Songs 1:13-14)
 As an apple tree among the trees of the wood,
 so is my love among young men.
 In his delightful shade I sit,
 and his fruit is sweet to my taste (Songs 2:3)

There is no shame in the physical desires felt by the Old Testament lovers and, at times they exhibit a near sexual frenzy:

I came upon the watchmen
 those who go on their rounds in the city:
 'have you seen my sweetheart?'

Barely had I passed them
 when I found my sweetheart.
 I caught him, would not let him go,
 not till I had brought him
 to my mother's house
 to the room where she conceived me! (Songs 3: 3-4)

At times, Greeley's characters share that sense of sexual frenzy, but the author insisted that "the sex in his novels wasn't just about ripping bodices." In a 1999 interview with the *National Catholic Reporter*, Greeley stated "At the most basic level, people learn from the novels that sex is good. Then they get the notion that sexual love is a sacrament of God's love, that sexual love tells us something about God. They also understand that God's love tells us something about sex" (Allen Fr. Andrew 2). Marital union as a symbol of God's relationship with his people is a common theme in Catholic literature, and a few Curial officials have recognized and legitimized Greeley's fictional translation of this concept. "Father Greeley has given great attention to the role of imagination in the life of faith," said Chicago's archbishop, Cardinal Francis George in 1999, "What he is doing is re-evangelizing the imagination, using fiction to express the faith and the mysteries of the faith. That's an extraordinarily significant project" (Allen Fr. Andrew 3). Many church officials, however, have remained consistently outraged at Greeley's fiction, a response worth analyzing.

There is certainly the initial knee-jerk reaction of a conservative mindset confronting material they consider "sinful." Additionally, Greeley wrote this material while wearing a clerical collar, a practice which threatened the Vatican's reputation as well as the laity's treasured (and often naïve) image of the parish priest. *Catholic Online's* Barbara Kralis calls

Greeley an “aging hippy...whose behavior is not consistent with the ordained priesthood” (2). Because of the ease with which Greeley writes about sex, his celibacy has often been called into question. In a 1999 interview Greeley stated “...people ask cute and snide questions about my sex life, which is none of their business...Either I don’t know anything about sex because I’m a priest and am pretending, or I know too much for a priest. Either way I lose” (Allen Pop Culture 2). Greeley also goes out of his way to dispel the myth that celibate priests are somehow immune to the attraction of the opposite sex. The following excerpt from *The Bishop and the Beggar Girl of St. Germain* represents a common refrain in Greeley novels:

“Is celibacy very difficult, Mr. Bishop?” my interpreter asked as we crossed the Luxembourg Gardens again.

“For those who are happy in the priesthood, it is usually no more difficult than marriage, which is not very easy.”

“Priests do find women attractive?”

“Oh, yes.”

“I thought so...it would be strange if they did not, n’est-ce pas?” (78)

Greeley’s inclusions of such scenes dispel the myth that male hormones somehow cease to exist at the moment of ordination. Despite hormones, however, Greeley has made it clear that he values the practice of sexual abstention. “For the record,” John Allen adds in his *NCR* interview, “Greeley has written elsewhere that he has upheld his priestly vow of celibacy” (Allen Pop Culture 2).

Why are conservatives like Kralis so incensed with Greeley’s prose? First, many of Greeley’s characters are not married when they first become lovers, although they are usually

engaged or married by the end of the novel (an indication that Greeley honors the institution of marriage). Not only are Greeley's characters engaging in pre-marital sex, but they are doing so with little or no guilt. (If they have guilt, it is addressed and rendered impotent after their first sexual encounter, leaving them to enjoy subsequent encounters with abandon.) Additionally, like Jenny Carlson and her lover Ned, many of Greeley's romantic characters are divorced and perhaps, according to a conservative Catholic mindset, don't exhibit the proper amount of regret over their failed marriages. (Greeley, however, is fairly consistent in showing that divorce does negatively affect children, a concern that often requires professional intervention.) And, like Jenny and Ned, many of Greeley's lovers are entering middle age and are well beyond child-bearing years.

While there is certainly no indication that the Vatican discourages sex for older couples, neither have they seemed to prioritize it. One wonders if they simply cannot see any value in sex that doesn't create new life. Greeley, on the other hand, gives non-procreative sex a prominent place in both his non-fiction and fiction. While the cover of Christopher West's *Theology of the Body for Beginners* features singles and couples in their twenties, as well as pictures of exuberant young families, Greeley's *Sex: the Catholic Experience*, shows a middle aged couple, also exuberant, but well beyond the years of child-bearing. The book, primarily a sociological text, includes a chapter titled "Love after Sixty." In this chapter, Greeley discusses the results of two national surveys, the larger having over 4400 respondents. Greeley's results reveal several statistics (at the time of the book's 1994 publication): the Catholic margin in frequency of sex increases in the years after age 55, half of those couples who enjoy frequent sex also enjoy periods of extended sexual play, and a quarter find pleasure in undressing each other. Others still enjoy showering or bathing together, sex outdoors, and swimming together in the nude. Thirty-

eight percent of couples in their sixties and 12 % in their seventies say that they experience ecstasy in lovemaking (152). Greeley admits that, physically, senior love-making is not necessarily better than that of their adult children, but that the “senior lover is more likely to think it is better” (153). The author attributes this to confidence and skills gained over time, freedom from inhibition and disappointment, and familiarity with each other’s bodies. With this portrait of senior love-making in mind, it is no wonder that many of Greeley’s romances and murder mysteries feature couples in the middle of their lives. This is indeed the case in Greeley’s mystery novel *The Bishop and the Missing L Train*.

Although Jenny’s and Ned’s ages are never specified, both have adult children and thus are clearly not meant to symbolize youthful sexuality. While the description of Ned is sparse, the description of Jenny, as seen through the eyes of various characters, is layered throughout the book. According to most, including Cardinal Cronin, Jenny Carlson is “totally ravishing” and “a real knock-out.” But Bishop Blackie’s description is the most telling:

She was, through no fault of her own or conscious effort, a deeply disturbing woman. In a gray business suit with a long skirt, she seemed rather prim. However, she quietly radiated an intense sexual appeal that filled the whole room. Men would go crazy for a touch of her hand. How old was she? Somewhere between thirty-five and fifty, with no clear hints in her smooth complexion and finely carved figure as to which number would be closer to the truth. After a moment, one did not care. (250).

Elsewhere, while musing that Jenny’s highly erotic artwork was incongruent with her image as a pious Irish matron, Bishop Blackie queried: “Which was she, fire or ice, or arguably both?” (250).

Readers familiar with Greeley's non-fiction will recognize the fire and ice symbolism that Greeley once attached to another Irish matron—Grace Kelly. In his 1983 book *A Piece of My Mind...on Just About Everything*, Greeley reprints a newspaper article titled “In Memoriam: Grace Kelly.” The article expresses Greeley's deep affection for actress Grace Kelly and his equally deep grief over her death in 1982. Greeley's attraction goes far beyond Kelly's “sexual elegance” and indeed, far beyond Kelly's existence as a woman, actress, wife, or mother. For Greeley, Kelly was a symbol, in much the same way that John F. Kennedy was a symbol:

She meant something special to our generation of Irish Catholics. We were told by our church leaders (though not by our heritage) that you could not be Irish and Catholic on the one hand and sexual on the other. And we were told by a couple of centuries of English oppression that you could not be Irish and Catholic on the one hand and elegant on the other. And Ms. Kelly, fire in the ice, inferno in the snow, represented in symbol that both the church and the English were wrong (39).

Greeley's impression of the strong Irish woman, part soft-hearted mother figure and part warrior goddess (Etain, Deirdre, Grainne, or Maeve) threads its way through much of his fiction. Bishop Blackie wears the cross of the Irish Saint Brigid. Many of Greeley's heroines are fiery red-heads with flash tempers and psychic gifts of the fey. Others, like Jenny Carlson, exude an inherent sexuality that threatens to consume the males around them. In this regard, they are ideal examples of one of Greeley's most basic sexual tenets: human beings are designed to attract one another, and in this way we mimic God. In his 1999 interview with *NCR*, Greeley stated that “God operates through attraction. He is the alluring God, the God that's calling, the God that's

appealing, the God that's seductive. That's the important influence of God in our life. Wherever there is allurements, wherever there is attraction, there is God" (Allen Pop Culture 2).

Greeley's fiction explores this attraction at several stages in the life cycle. In many of his novels, the story of a middle aged couple rediscovering love is intertwined with that of a very young couple in the throes of first love. In *The Bishop and the Missing L Train*, that couple is "young Tommy Flynn" and the even younger Notre Dame Soccer player he first encounters on his television screen. Comparing the women's soccer team to "frolicking and hunting lionesses in the Serengeti," Tommy focuses on "the principal lioness, a young woman named Christy Logan. Wet from the rain, her blue-and-gold Irish uniform covered with mud, her blond hair in a ponytail, this Christy Logan person, chewing gum fiercely, was nonetheless one of the most beautiful women I had ever seen." Tommy's description of a muddy, gum chewing, ponytailed woman seen only through his television screen, seems to indicate that Christy's ability to allure did not flow from mere physical beauty and did not require proximity to Tommy, but was enhanced by her aggression on the soccer field. It didn't take long for Tommy's interest to take on a slightly erotic flavor. "Head lioness," Tommy muses, "Perhaps the kind that would growl even at Simba" (18). Less than two minutes later, Tommy narrates that "I admit that I engaged in the male's age-old propensity to undress mentally an attractive woman—shapely if sinewy and muddy legs, narrow, narrow waist, neatly shaped rear end, and exquisite breasts that even the soccer sweatshirt could not hide...My fantasies ran out of control. I imagined her in the shower after the match was over" (19).

Tommy's lapse into fantasy will trouble many Christians, Protestant and Catholic alike. After all, the Bible states: "You have heard how it was said, '*you shall not commit adultery.*'"

But I say this to you, if a man looks at a woman lustfully, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt. 5: 27-28). Even in his denial of erotophobia, Popcak, the man who promises curled-toes and a blown mind, would label Tommy’s fantasies as “fool’s gold” in the hunt for Holy Sex (Popcak 17). Because Tommy’s attraction was driven strictly by arousal rather than intimacy, Gregory Popcak would classify it as eroticism, which “causes shame, uses the other while withholding the self, fears children, grows stale and stagnant with time, and brings disease and death” (17). Like Popcak, Greeley is adamantly opposed to the practice of “casual” sex in which men and women use each other for the sole purpose of genital release. He does not agree, however, that the path to “Holy Love” is somehow ruined by the arrival of eroticism. Instead, Greeley recognizes fantasy as a crucial step in the attraction stage of human coupling. The following conversation, found in Greeley’s murder mystery *The Bishop Goes to The University* provides Bishop Blackie’s typical response when asked about sexual fantasies:

“You were in your office, David Dolan?”

“Working late because I’m up for a tenure review. Fantasizing occasionally about my bride to be.”

“David!”

“A man in love is entitled to his fantasies, isn’t he Bishop?”

“Without them, the species would not survive” (37).

Fantasy is not reserved for young men like David Dolan and Tommy Flynn. Jenny’s lover Ned seems well practiced in the art of sexual fantasy:

The man stares at me. His spirit comes out of his body and embraces me, caresses me, undresses me, plays with me. I should be offended, perhaps, but I am not. There is no cruelty in his gaze. It is always respectful. I am afraid of it, but I enjoy it. My mind and body go limp. (55).

Greeley makes it clear that Jenny is not afraid of Ned's attentions because they are indicative of physical danger, but because they are charged with a desire for intimacy. It is an indication that sexual desire can be intensely erotic without being invasive or disrespectful. Greeley then makes it clear that tendencies toward sexual fantasy are not unique to men. Standing outside Ned's office door, Jenny narrates:

Now I envelop him without even looking at him. I run my fingers through his curly hair. I cover his beautiful face with my kisses. I unbutton my blouse and lay his head against my breasts. He sighs deeply, content with me, for a moment healed from pain. My body is aroused again, ready for lovemaking.

Here Greeley introduces another aspect of human sexuality, the concept that intimacy heals. "A lover does indeed provide delight, but he also helps protect, provides care, and helps to avoid discouragement, weariness, and boredom" (Greeley *Sexual Intimacy* 156). Greeley is quick to point out that this healing nature of sex is not necessarily related to genitalia—"Orgasms are nice, but affection and tenderness are indispensable" (156).

Like Jenny, Tommy Flynn is both frightened and drawn in by his feelings of sexual attraction. Determined to rid himself of those feelings, he shuts off the soccer game—for exactly as long as it takes to warm up his tea: "When the screen came up, a picture of a fiercely grinning Christy Logan filled it. Maeve had won another battle. Despite the mud on her face, she was

unbearably beautiful.” After watching his Notre Dame Lioness walk off the field, Tommy renewed his shower fantasies (19). Like Jenny and Ned, Tommy Flynn has failed to escape the sticky web of sexual attraction. As the novel progresses, Greeley will help the lovers, young and old, navigate another one of the author’s firm beliefs—that sex is a powerful force.

In his *Sex and Intimacy: Love and Play*, Greeley writes:

The most fundamental insight that primitive man had about sexuality is one that we frequently overlook or forget: that it is a raw, primal, basic power over which we have only very limited control. Primitive man invariably viewed sexuality as sacred because for him the “sacred” was the “powerful,” and sexuality was one of the fundamental forces that kept the universe going...ancient man also knew what tremendous power his own sexuality had over his own behavior. He was afraid of that power because he knew it could drive him into a frenzy. He did not understand it, he could not contain it, and therefore, like every other power that was both strong and mysterious, his own sexuality became something sacred (25).

Greeley points out that, throughout history, man has invented an incredible number of sexual taboos and conventions in a misguided, and often bizarre, attempt to tame his sexuality.

Conventions of dress were one such measure, designed to limit sexual fantasies. Greeley argues that “the clock could be rolled back to 1890 and [a] young woman be covered from neck to toe...it wouldn’t matter much...a young man’s imagination would still perform exactly the same operations as would his descendants in 1970” (32).

According to Greeley, puritanical religious systems have caused many conventions to “deteriorate into rigid legalisms” (26.) Protestants and Catholics alike are encouraged to guard

against sexual temptation and to practice “thought-stopping” when confronted with troubling thoughts or images. For many Christians, the fight against “sexual sin” has become an exhausting, all-consuming, hopeless journey into neurosis. Despite our best efforts, however, Greeley notes that “every one of us experiences his own sexuality as imperious and demanding. Our craving for sexual satisfaction, for sexual relief, for sexual union, permeates our being and frequently dominates our behavior to the exclusion of all else” (27). Despite taboo, convention, religious legalism and mountains of guilt, however, it seems that our sexuality cannot be tamed.

Greeley argues that we have no business even trying to tame our sexuality. “A tame sexuality,” he states, “is not a human sexuality” (29). The beginning of sexual wisdom, adds Greeley, is to recognize that we are dealing with a raw, elemental force that cannot be tamed. “Living with sexuality,” insists Greeley, “does not mean eliminating the primal force; it means rather, understanding how primal the force is and channeling it in directions that are both socially and personally productive” (29). Celibate or married, a substantial quantity of sexual energy can be diverted into other channels such as “non-genital friendships, aggression, ambition, artistic creativity, altruism, idealism, and social commitment” (37). Additionally, everyone either sublimates or represses a certain amount of sexual energy. When embracing sexuality with a committed partner, however, the raw, elemental force of sex can be a gold mine of pursuit, fantasy, sexual play, and exploration. Jenny narrates the following sexual encounter with Ned:

Another time, after Sunday brunch at his apartment, he is inside of me, just beginning to thrust. He pauses. “You are astonishingly transparent, Jenny,” he tells me. “You have no defenses anymore. I can slip into the beautiful crystal waters of your soul just as easily as I slip into your body.”

Hardly a time for poetry, I think. “You can slip into my body easily,” I reply, “because you have made me soaking wet with all the things you’ve done to me.

“I could spend the rest of our lives plumbing the depths of your astonishing mystery and only begin to know you. Still, the exploration will be pure joy” (116).

Several months into their relationship, Tommy and Christie’s dialogue is somewhat less sophisticated and poetic, but it reveals the same “goldmine of pursuit, fantasy, sexual play, and exploration” (37):

“I totally need some foreplay to prepare for marriage. You can’t expect me to do it all on our wedding night.”

I gulped and choked on my wine. The best thing I could do now was to run.

“Foreplay?” I sputtered.

“You know, mess around with my boobs and stuff.”

Greeley’s vision of sexual intimacy is modeled on friendship, which he declares to be risk-taking and rhythmic, alternating between hiding and revelation, mystery and blatancy, giving and receiving, and conquest and surrender. Greeley readily dismisses the puritan constraints of a religion steeped in Augustinian regret and Vatican frigidity. However, he cannot so readily dismiss the dreadful wounds that lovers often carry into their bedrooms. Greeley asserts that the primary determiner for a successful marriage is the family-of-origin stories of each partner (Greeley *Sex* 15). In *The Bishop and the Missing L Train*, Tommy is seeing a therapist in order to work through issues of child abuse and parental divorce. Jenny is seeing a psychiatrist to face a catastrophic first marriage. (It is interesting that Greeley’s characters always seek help from

secular sources, rather than the Church. Perhaps it is subtle advice to his readers because he doubts the Church's wisdom or sensitivity in psychological matters). Greeley makes it clear that neither would find success in future relationships without the intervention of professionals. Conversely, Tommy's description of Christie's upbringing shows the results of positive parenting: "Her parents are lovely people...I understood why she was who she is. She had grown up in a climate of powerful and generous love. I envied her" (96). In many of Greeley's novels, the author's view of sexual intimacy and marital happiness absolutely requires a reckoning with past influences and experiences. Not surprisingly, the second phase of healing often occurs in the bedroom.

In *Sexual Intimacy: Love and Play*, Greeley asks the question, "What does intimacy have to do with theology?" (15). What does Ned's scream of pleasure and Tommy's shower fantasies have to do with Christopher West's insistence that marital love be *fruitful* or Popcak's admonitions against seeking an erotic experience? Greeley answered his own question, saying "Probably nothing" (15). Embracing ourselves as sexual beings is not about thought-stopping or contraception or fear of losing control at the public bath. According to Andrew Greeley, it is about self-knowledge and self-acceptance. It is about acknowledging, respecting and harnessing a profoundly powerful force. Mostly, though, sex is about mimicking a pursuing, seducing, attracting and alluring God.

Chapter Three

“She was a Damn Good Priest”: Catholic Imagination and the Ordination of Women

In his book, *How to Save the Catholic Church*, Greeley contends that the Church's issues with sexuality are much deeper than squabbles over contraception and the bedroom antics of its parishioners: the Church has a sex problem, because it has a woman problem. “The Catholic Church will not be able to bear witness to the sacramentality of sex,” Greeley insists, “until it rids itself of a deeply ingrained, and largely unacknowledged, bias against women” (130). In most of his writing, Greeley avoids the current church controversies, such as women's rights to participate in the roles of the diaconate or acolyte. Instead, he charges directly into the heart of the matter, addressing the Church's most controversial woman issue: “Women must be allowed to be ordained if the Church is to bear witness to the full implications of the sacramentality of women.” (151).

Greeley confronts the issue of female ordination in his 2001 mystery *The Bishop and the Beggar Girl of St. Germain*. In the novel, Bishop Blackie is dispatched to Paris to discover the fate of a popular television priest who vanished on a tour of the ruins beneath Notre-Dame de Paris. An expert in locked room mysteries, Blackie quickly deduces how the priest managed to disappear, but struggles to understand why Jean-Claude Chretien would choose to do so, leaving a nation of young people mourning for their lost hero. Through a series of interviews with French priests, prelates, nuns, television producers, students, nobles, and policemen, Blackie pieces together a confusing picture of the handsome young priest. Some found him utterly transparent while others saw him as slyly opaque. Young women felt a strong sense of

heterosexual energy. Those priests who were jealous of his success, however, called him “a pretty boy” with an obvious implication of homosexuality. When Blackie watches tapes of Jean-Claude’s Christmas Mass, he finds him “simply enchanting—open, transparent, unself-conscious, happy” (27). There was no false piety in the young man’s excellent preaching, rather it communicated a deep and authentic faith. When Blackie finds himself comparing Jean-Claude Chretien to Thérèse of Lisieux, Joan of Arc and St. Bernadette, Greeley’s readers perhaps gain a hint of what is to come. Indeed, it is revealed in the final chapter that Frère Jean-Claude Chretien is actually Jeanne-Chantal Chretien, a skilled actress who began impersonating her twin brother when he died shortly after ordination. “He had a disease,” Jeanne-Chantal explained when the impersonation was discovered. “He wanted to be a priest so passionately. He knew he would not live long enough. He became obsessed with the plan that I should take his place. I know it seems insane now, but because of my love for him, it seemed quite sane then” (186).

Greeley’s ruse went beyond the desire to tell a good mystery story. He had a specific motive for putting a cross-dressing female priest on television in front of millions of French Catholics who adored her. Greeley’s reading audience had ample time to gain respect for the young woman’s scholarship, intelligence, priestly skills and holiness before learning of the impersonation. Examining the books in Jeanne-Chantal’s living quarters, Bishop Blackie finds “Chenu, Congar, Teilhard, Rahner, Küng, von Balthassar, Geffré, and Josua.” Moreover, the books were dog-eared and heavily marked with all the right sentences underlined—“Jean-Claude had done his work” (157). An examination of the priest’s sermon notes revealed that she worked systematically, crossing out lines, sentences and paragraphs. Four drafts of the Easter sermon produced a flawless Eucharist service, high praise from Greeley, whose non-fiction consistently bemoans the terrible preaching of Catholic priests. Later, readers learn that Père Renault, the

Jesuit publisher of the French Catholic newspaper *Le Figaro* is anxious to analyze Jean-Claude's books and notes: "...we are inclined to believe that [Jean-Claude] has, perhaps more successfully than anyone in thirty years, adapted the theological insights of the Second Vatican Council to everyday preaching. He has combined new theological thought with traditional religious rhetoric with remarkable skill" (145).

Greeley also highlights Jeanne-Chantal's skills as a priest. As a Father-confessor and pastor, she received high praise from several sources. The young Jewish woman who produced his television show stated that most of the Jews in Paris admired Jean-Claude, adding that "he was very much like one of our best rabbis" (118). The students in the Latin Quarter "thought that he was the only one in this whole terrible city that cared for us as human beings." For them, Jean-Claude was "like the sun rising in the spring, a burst of light in our lives" (124). "He had the ability," said one student, "to make all of us think we were special" (125). Despite their love for Jean-Claude, not one of the young priest's acquaintances suspected a secret identity. Why was Jeanne-Chantal Chretien hidden so carefully and so completely behind the image of her brother? Perhaps Greeley felt the subterfuge necessary in order to bypass the conservative mindsets of traditional Catholics. Then, with a painstaking characterization of this woman as a brilliant theologian, suffering saint and wise, compassionate priest, Greeley effectively shattered the notion that women are inherently incapable of being good priests.

The ordination of women is one of the most controversial issues facing the Catholic Church today. If Greeley's target audience of young, educated females needs an elaborate charade to bypass their collection of preset notions, older male traditionalists, particularly those in Curial power seats, will need a virtual earthquake to unsettle their ingrained biases. For them, granting leadership roles to women isn't an intellectual or theological exercise. Ordaining

females would require facing the truth that the Church's teachings about women were built on misconception and misrepresentation. It would also require an excruciating re-ordering of gut level beliefs and emotions. In *How to Save the Catholic Church*, Greeley insists that the Church must no longer be excused for its anti-feminine stance. Rather, it should be "in the forefront of efforts to affirm the personhood of woman" (130).

Greeley further states that the Church has a "mistrust, fear, and even hatred of women" (132), and that these emotions come with ancient roots. Early Israelite writings portray a culture dominated by males who were confused and frightened by women (132). Jewish men did not understand human reproduction and thus ostracized the female who, although sexually attractive, bled profusely every month and had the seemingly bizarre capabilities of carrying, bearing, and suckling young. The Old Testament culture steadfastly regarded menstrual bleeding as a sign of impurity. Even giving birth to a female child, rather than a son, doubled a woman's period of banishment from the Temple, as if carrying a female in her body had somehow increased the taint of impurity (132). Greeley points out that Christianity was born into this environment and that New Testament views of women are largely influenced by these Jewish beliefs. Greeley further speculates that the progressively negative and misogynistic attitudes of New Testament writers like St. Paul fed directly into the doctrine of the Catholic Church. Paul admonishes women to behave in accordance to their second class citizenry by being quiet in church and keeping their heads covered, as fitting for those born into submission to males. Augustine, who had, according to Greeley, found a religious basis for his abhorrence of women, reiterates Paul's admonitions to women. Augustine insisted that, because woman was fashioned from the rib of man, the Christian husband is to rule while his wife serves: "What is worse than a house where the woman has governance over the man? But that house is proper where the man commands,

the woman obeys” (Augustine qtd in Greeley 134). One could speculate that by adopting this position of dominance, Augustine had symbolically found a way to bring his own troubling sexuality into submission. Hellenistic scholar Origen summarized the Greek attitude towards women when he wrote “What is seen with the eyes of the Creator is masculine, and not feminine, for God does not stoop to look upon what is feminine and of the flesh” (Origen qtd in Greeley 134).

In his monograph *The Ordination of Women in the Catholic Church: Unmasking a Cuckoo’s Egg Tradition*, John Wijngaards explores the historical arguments against ordaining women into the Catholic priesthood. Traditional arguments have focused on the subservience and inferiority of women, as well as the belief that leadership was “against their nature.” Medieval theologians such as Huguccio and de Baysio taught that women still carried the burden of Eve’s sin and were therefore disqualified from service (61). Wijngaards points out that a second batch of arguments, mainly attributed to Paul, proceeded from the fact that women had been previously excluded. Thus Paul was able to look back at the Christian church’s brief history and note that Jesus did not include a woman among the apostles and that there were no women at the Last Supper. He interpreted these facts as proof that God had deliberately chosen to exclude women from leadership positions. Other scholars insisted that women could not serve as priests because they were unclean during certain times of the month and therefore unable to enter the church. Middleton and Scotus taught that it was improper for a woman to wear a tonsure, touch sacred objects, or wear sacred vestments (63).

The Vatican’s current argument against the ordination of women is based on the symbolic relationship between Christ and the Church. In this stream of logic, the image of Christ as Bridegroom and the Church as the Bride of Christ was so crucial that Jesus *had* to come to

earth as a man and, because Jesus wants this symbolism to continue, only male priests can represent him at the Eucharist (113). Wijngaards views this premise as “symbolism run amok” (118) and points out that even the Vatican can’t anchor it in fact, choosing rather to label it as an issue of “congruence” (113). Steinfels links the argument to the terminology *in persona Christi*, meaning that the priest must act “in the person of Christ,” especially when presiding over the Eucharist” (295). In order for this to occur, many argue, the priest must be male. According to Steinfels, the Church has argued for a “natural resemblance” between Christ and the priest, a qualification that many find either vague or euphemistic. Does this resemblance revolve around height, hirsuteness, or pitch of voice? Isn’t “a natural resemblance” just a euphemistic term for “possessing a penis?” (293). Steinfels quotes official statements saying that “the faithful must be able to perceive the priest as a sign of Christ ‘with ease’ and that such an image of Christ ‘would be difficult to see’ if the priest were not male” (298). Steinfels points out that these are clearly judgements related to moments in a particular culture and not meant to point to an unchanging reality. If the church had ordained women priests long ago, Steinfels argues, it is “hard to imagine that it would not be living comfortably with the very same imagery, symbols, and assumptions about men and women” (298). According to Steinfels, the Church is all too aware that cultural biases can easily crumble, particularly in an era of post-conciliar enlightenment. His description of the Church’s handling of the woman issue is that of an organization running scared. Traditionalists have fiercely opposed policy developments that would give women prominence in the liturgy. In their view, allowing a woman to stand in front of the congregation as a deaconess or acolyte may accustom parishioners to the idea of women serving as priests or decision makers. According to Steinfels, Vatican officials fear that “with a little acclimatization,

Catholics may all too easily see the image of Christ in a woman priest—and therefore must be kept from anything approaching that” (304).

It is precisely this need for acclimatization that led Greeley to create a wildly successful female priest in *The Bishop and the Beggar Girl of St. Germain*. Once a phenomenon can be imagined it can become reality and Greeley gives his readers ample opportunity to imagine Jeanne-Chantal in a priestly role. What’s more, she preaches homilies and offers the Body and Blood of Jesus during Mass and nothing horrible happens. Not only is God not enraged, but Bishop Blackie offers her assurance that “God is proud of you Her beloved child, and of all the good work you’ve done in His name” (196). With that simple statement from Bishop Blackie, Greeley helps assuage the doubts of women who feel a strong desire to serve in forbidden roles.

In *How to Save the Catholic Church*, Greeley exposes the Vatican’s arguments against ordaining women as convenient excuses couched in religious rhetoric. According to Greeley, the Curia is saturated in a chauvinism rooted in misunderstanding, mistrust, and fear that leads to an irrational hatred. A prime example of the Vatican’s tendency toward institutional chauvinism is the attitude of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. In 1986, Ratzinger (Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith) issued *The Ratzinger Report*, a Vatican approved document on the state of the Catholic Church. In this officially sanctioned report, Ratzinger, who would become Pope Benedict XVI in 2005, spoke extensively about the ordination of women. This statement was couched in language that alternated between compassion, sarcasm, and blatant paternalism:

At first sight it seems that the demands of radical feminism in favor of a total equality between man and woman are extremely noble and, at any rate, perfectly logical...To many, this demand for the ordination of women, this possibility of having Catholic

priestesses, appears not only justified but obvious: a simple and inevitable adaptation of the Church to a new social situation that has come into being (94).

The reader, alerted by the use of the term “radical feminism” and the qualifying language of “at first sight” and “appears” will sense immediately where this statement is heading. Indeed, Ratzinger condemns the feminist movement for trivializing sexual specificity and thus making the roles of men and women interchangeable. This, he notes, has resulted in a series of “fatal ruptures,” including that between sexuality and procreation. “Detached from the bond with fecundity,” he adds, “sex no longer seems to be a determined characteristic, as a radical and pristine orientation of the person” (95). Ratzinger continues by sarcastically ridiculing transgendered individuals, calling them “those who seek to escape the slavery of nature” by “demanding the right to be male or female at one’s will or pleasure, for example, through surgery, and demanding that the State record this autonomous will of the individual in its registry offices.” Perhaps the most offensive portion of Ratzinger’s diatribe is his paternalistically condescending assertion that “It is precisely woman who is paying the greatest price” by relinquishing her profoundest vocations—motherhood and virginity (99). By seeking a vocation in the priesthood, the future Holy Father was saying, women sacrifice any hope of true happiness. Despite Ratzinger’s dire predictions that they are destined to lose their “radical and pristine orientation” of personhood and doomed to unhappiness, some women are willing to take the risk because they are convinced that they have been called to the priesthood. Although the Vatican has grudgingly offered minor roles in the Eucharist, women who have a priestly calling often resist those tempting propositions. They understand that accepting Curial crumbs would allow their archdiocese to avoid the issue of ordination of women. For these women who are battling the Vatican Goliath, leadership and ordination are synonymous (Byrne 103).

For the Vatican, the ordination of women is synonymous with loss of authority. Even the smallest doctrinal change induces panic in traditionalists, forcing them to think the unthinkable—that someday they may have to share the power of the priesthood with women. This institutional chauvinism has often been handed down through the ranks. Memoirs of Greeley’s seminary days reveal that, even as late as the 1950s, new priests were indoctrinated with negative views toward women. In *Confessions of a Parish Priest*, Greeley points out that priests of his generation were “trained in the fear and loathing of women”:

In Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* there are repeated references to women as swamps and traps designed to swallow up the souls of men. [This attitude was] not all that different from that of the spiritual director who warned us of the dangers lurking in the splendid form of Janet Leigh. Women were portrayed as a threat to the virtue of celibates and the manliness of married men. They were, as one medieval saint put it, “vomit and ordure... How then can we ever want to embrace what is merely a sack of rottenness.” And you wonder why the Church is hung up on sex! (119).

Greeley’s seminary instructors would have done well to save their breath rather than attempt to poison the author’s views on women. Those familiar with Greeley’s writing can attest to his deep reverence for the feminine. His fiction readers have become accustomed to his use of feminine pronouns when referencing God. The Deity is often a “She” or “Herself,” although readers will note that these pronouns are alternated with the more traditional use of male pronouns.

While the practice may seem whimsical, Greeley has a very specific purpose for defying tradition by portraying God in both masculine and feminine terms. In *How to Save the Catholic Church*, Greeley writes, “Church policy would improve vastly if there were an increased emphasis on woman as an analog for God—that is, God is like a woman, but God is more than

woman. The shattering potential of this idea makes it the logical antidote to the Church's present paralysis on women's issues" (130). By portraying God as neither strictly male nor strictly female, or perhaps as both male and female, Greeley hopes to remind the Church that, according to scripture, the "fullness of God" is "mirrored in creatures, male and female" and that both men and women have been "made in the image of God" (130). It hasn't been an easy sell. While Catholic theologians have failed, or perhaps refused, to respond to Greeley's practice of casting God in the feminine, Presbyterian minister William David Spencer found Greeley's theology "very interesting and, eventually, very disturbing" (Spencer 183). Spencer contends that Greeley's feminization of God leads to a sense of immanence that results in over-familiarity and disrespect. As an example of this contention, Spencer quotes the phrase "God be good to [my mother], and if She isn't She's going to hear about it," found in Greeley's *Happy are the Meek* (Greeley *Meek* 148 qtd in Spencer 184). Spencer acknowledges that, by using a mix of "He's" and "She's" when referencing God, Greeley is suggesting "a full picture of God, a reality whose nature is only expressed in both the feminine and masculine" (184). Spencer argues, however, that Greeley's "anthropomorphic God is hardly the great victor pictured in the Scriptures," but is instead "a God who is pathetically eager to forgive at the slightest hint of any emotion that can be called compunction" (184). Thus, Spencer ridicules this bi-gendered God for being weak and overly forgiving, traits that are stereotypically female. Those familiar with Greeley's fiction, however, will recognize that the author's image of a compassionate, forgiving God is not tied to gender. For example, *In The Bishop and the Missing L Train*, Greeley uses bi-gendered pronouns to express God's love to a gay choir director:

"Do you think God hates me because he made me gay, Bishop?"

"I think that God loves us all, as a parent loves a child. He doesn't hate anyone."

“Is it God’s will that I’m gay; is it part of His plan?”

“God works with everything that happens and draws us to Herself by Her own ways. In that sense, surely it is God’s will. However, it is not God’s will that we suffer for what we are. When we do suffer, God suffers with us” (180).

Greeley is not advocating the neutralization of gender when he uses interchangeable pronouns, rather he is encouraging the Church to embrace God as equal parts masculine and feminine.

Neither does Greeley encourage anti-feminism in women who seek the priesthood—women who seek ordination don’t have to reject the beauty of the feminine body by adopting masculine “modes of behavior” in order to fit into their new role (132). In *The Bishop and the Beggar Girl of St. Germain*, Greeley emphasizes Jeanne-Chantal’s discomfort in having to adopt a male persona and her relief when circumstances allow her to return to her feminine self. Although she has performed her role as a male priest admirably, she revels in her role as a woman. For example, when pastoring a small group of cloistered nuns, she would sneak out of the convent at night in order to leave her male persona behind for a time. In this quote, Greeley seems to link gender self-acceptance and expression with mental health: “Those nights saved my sanity, Bishop Blackie. I could be a woman again, act like a woman, talk like a woman, smoke like a woman, even flirt like a woman” (186).

In order to successfully confront its issues with women, Greeley insists that “the Church must celebrate the sacramentality of woman’s body as this idea has been nurtured in the religious imagination of the Catholic tradition” (Greeley *Save* 130). For examples of this imagination, Greeley points to Biblical stories that reveal the feminine nature of God, such as the prophet Isaiah’s portrayal of God as a woman in childbirth (42:13-14), and a woman suckling her child (49: 14-15). God is also portrayed as a seamstress, a midwife, and a mistress. The “Mary myth”

is another way that Catholics have honored the feminine, although Greeley notes that the Church has desperately attempted to “desexualize” and “de-eroticize” her, an impossible task since she is known to have nursed children and conceived siblings for Jesus through sexual intercourse.

Folk Catholicism has been celebrating Mary the Mother of Jesus for centuries. Steinfels notes that this has been crucial in feminizing the language associated with the image of God—not by replacing the masculine language with the feminine, but by enlarging the concept to include both (292). Mary, however is not divine and thus is to remain distinct from the Godhead. In his book *A People Adrift*, Steinfels argues that Wisdom, an undeniably female personification of an attribute of God, is “the more directly pertinent resource for breaking the masculine monopoly on God’s language” (292). Steinfels defines Wisdom as the “female personification of God’s creative presence and activity.” The following verses are from the book of Wisdom, found in the Old Testament:

Wisdom is brilliant, she never fades

By those who love her, she is readily seen,

by those who seek her, she is readily found.

She anticipates those who desire her by making herself known first.

Whoever gets up early to seek her will have no trouble

but will find her sitting at the door. (Wisdom 6:12-14)

Wisdom is not relegated exclusively to the Old Testament. Early Christians used this personification to articulate the divinity of Jesus. While some officials of the Catholic Church have been content to allow this feminine language to slip from common usage, others have sought to protect the tradition of Wisdom. In a 1990s statement on inclusive language translations, American bishops stipulated that the wisdom literature’s feminine language “should

not be obscured or replaced by the use of masculine imagery in English translations” (Steinfels 292). Mary, Wisdom, and American women finally have a place at the table, but is it a place of honor?

Eleventh century theologian and priest Thomas Aquinas taught that women were imperfect human beings, a deficient and misbegotten male, according to Aristotle (Wijngaards 102). Power and life were carried in the semen and the birth of a female child indicated that that semen had somehow been weakened. God was able to use this misfire, however, by allowing women to participate in the procreative cycle as receptacles for this nearly magical substance. In view of this belief that women were inherently deficient, it is no wonder that Thomas Aquinas firmly believed that a woman could not be a “sacramental sign representing Christ” (Wijngaards 101). Because Aquinas believed that “the male sex was required to receive Orders” (to be ordained), sacraments such as Holy Communion would be invalid if administered by a woman. (Aquinas qtd in Wijngaards 101). In *The Bishop and the Beggar Girl of St. Germain*, Greeley addresses this, in a conversation between Bishop Blackie and the recently exposed Jeanne-Chantal:

“What about all the Eucharists, all the sacraments of reconciliation? Were they valid?”

She was using liturgically correct term. Kids born after 1965 almost never heard “Mass” or “Confession.”

“What do you think?”

“The Pope would say they were not, n’est-ce pas?”

“D’accord.”

“And what would God say?”

“What do you think, Jeanne-Chantal?”

“Maybe He would laugh and say that was a silly question and I should let Him worry about it.”

“Her,” I said automatically. (196)

Bishop Blackie’s response to this question of doctrine is somewhat vague and circuitous. Greeley seems almost hesitant to push his views of female ordination upon readers, perhaps desiring them to decide the issue for themselves. While Greeley is on record as being in favor of women in the priesthood, he has also noted that a change in official Church policy is only half the battle—it must be accompanied by a change in attitude toward women in order for it to be counted as successful. (Greeley *How to Save* 151).

Cardinal Cronin’s response to Jeanne-Chantal’s impersonation is also difficult to pin down:

“I’ll be damned!” Sean Cronin exclaimed.

“Not very likely,” I said in dissent.

“Are you sure that it’s all true?”

“Oh yes.”

He pondered the story for a moment.

“She became her brother?”

“At some point, she was perhaps more Jean-Claude than Jeanne-Chantal... She had the good sense to desert the drama while she was still sane.”

“Tough young woman.”

“Patently.”

“She was a damn good priest, wasn’t she, Blackwood?”

“Indeed.”

“It just goes to show you,” he said with a faintly ironic laugh.

Always the discreet auxiliary bishop, I did not inquire what it went to show me.

“Our mutual friend in Rome wouldn’t like it.”

“What the poor man doesn’t know won’t hurt him.

“She fooled them all, didn’t she?” he said, rubbing his hands in satisfaction. “As your friend Nuala Anne would say, good on her.”

“Arguably.”

Cardinal Cronin’s observation that Jeanne-Chantal was “a damn good priest” carries weight (at least for Catholic readers) in light of his rank in the Curia. His statement that “she fooled them all” was a reminder that Jeanne-Chantal’s impersonation of her brother was indeed a performance orchestrated by a talented actress. Throughout the novel, however, Greeley makes it clear that Jeanne-Chantal’s role as a priest was much more than mere acting.

Jeanne-Chantal Chretien was a young Catholic woman in the midst of a crisis of faith. At times she was nearly atheistic in her views, but at other times observers endowed her with a holiness that, at least from a religious viewpoint, could only have been divine in origin. Describing Jean-Claude, Père Renault said, “Holiness shone from his face and filled his speech.” During a televised Christmas Eucharist, Jean-Claude stopped preaching and began singing Christmas carols, a seemingly inspired act that resonated with viewers across the nation (112). While her crisis of faith is profound, Greeley is careful to communicate that Jeanne-Chantal’s struggle is not linked to her gender, but is simply a part of being human and being a priest. To add emphasis to this concept, in a meeting with students in the Latin Quarter, Blackie is asked if priests lose their faith, to which he replies, “No more often than a couple of times a day” (127).

Jeanne-Chantal grows spiritually through her impersonation of a priest and, in the end, resolves her crisis of faith. Case in point, during her first meeting with Bishop Blackie, Jeanne-Chantal states, “I am an atheist, *Monseigneur*. However, I keep my options open.” In her final meeting with the Blackie, however, she states, “Bishop Blackie, we are so blind and deaf. The world is transparent. God is everywhere whispering to us, talking to us, shouting at us. Usually we do not hear. Sometimes we do. Then we know that everything is grace” (204). One indication of this transformation is that, regardless of her gender, Jeanne-Chantal is, in the fullness of her position as a child of God, responsive to the voice of God. Another implication is that God is not angry with her for taking a place at the altar (a place doctrinally reserved for men), but rather God has stayed by her side throughout the impersonation, helping her to resolve her crisis of faith. While Jeanne-Chantal is called to be a beloved child of God, she is not, however, called to be a priest. Her role as a vehicle of change—allowing readers to acclimatize to a woman priest—is over at the end of *The Bishop and the Beggar Girl of St. Germain*. In subsequent novels she is married and the mother of a young son.

There is some hope that, like Jeanne-Chantal, the Catholic Church will someday resolve its crisis of faith, at least in regard to the woman question. Steinfels notes that in 1965, all but a tiny fraction of Catholics found the possibility of female ordination absolutely unthinkable. Thirty years later, over sixty percent of Catholics favored women priests. Due to a worldwide priest shortage, women have been placed in highly visible roles, such as “diocesan chancellors, marriage tribunal members, seminary professors, and directors of religious education” (293). Additionally, many priests are overcoming their bias against women. According to Greeley, many parish priests use female acolytes “in direct defiance of Rome” One pastor joked that “If the Pope comes to our parish, we won’t use them that day” (Greeley *How to Save* 4). Thus,

Catholic congregations are growing accustomed to the presence of women near the altar. Both Steinfels and Greeley predict that it is only a matter of time before women take their rightful place *at* the altar.

Conclusion

Greeley in Transition: From an Old Niche to New Readers

Greeley was a complicated man. He wove a lifetime of intelligent observation, hands-on experience, and strong opinions into his fictional and non-fictional works. As an Irishman, he reveled in his identity as a Seanchaí. As a dedicated denizen of the city of Chicago, he was proud to be a staunch democrat and an ire-raising political columnist. He was a celibate priest who wrote what many church officials considered to be pornographic novels. He was a parish cleric who understood that clericalism was indeed the enemy (Emile Zola quoted in Greeley, *St. Germain* 183). Despite his criticism of Catholicism, past and present, his affection for the Catholic Church is evident throughout his work.

Critics may find the sheer volume of Greeley's nonfiction—sociological, theological, and autobiographical texts—to be intimidating. Likewise, his body of fiction was large and difficult to classify, particularly in the era in which he wrote. Were they romances? Mysteries? Fantasies? Most heroines of 1980s and 1990s romance novels were more likely to run into bastard sons of the English gentry than sniper's nests in the Vatican. Few mysteries of the period had multiple chapters confronting marital misunderstandings and rediscovering lost loves. And, for the most part, the fantastical was reserved for those readers who invested in science fiction or fantasy. Greeley's fiction, on the other hand, seemed to combine these elements of genre into a twisted knot. This was likely disconcerting for pre-millennial readers accustomed to cozy mysteries by Martha Grimes or even Catholic mysteries by Ellis Peters and Elizabeth George. Greeley's socio-religious focus added another strand of complexity, perhaps one that non-Catholics felt no

desire to untangle. Perhaps Greeley had trouble fitting his work into the genre concepts of his era and decided to stop trying. On the other hand, perhaps he was a rebel—or simply a man ahead of his time.

Although a deeply spiritual man, Greeley was a practical man. Even though he had been ordained in a tradition steeped in mysticism, those looking for the word *mystery* in Greeley's theological texts will be disappointed. For Greeley, mystery meant the clever stories of G.K. Chesterton and discovering the clues needed to keep Father Brown—and Bishop Blackie—on the trail of truth. The mystery genre wasn't inherently sacred to Greeley. Rather, like his sociological and theological texts, it was a tool to communicate truth and illumine lives. Thus, Greeley seemed to have had a casual relationship with the rules of crime fiction, at least those set down by S.S. Van Dine. Greeley certainly seemed to follow the rules of fair play—no clues came out of the closet at the last minute—although a priest with a twin may qualify as a “willful trick or deception” (Van Dine 2). Greeley utterly ignored Van Dine's admonition that “there must be no love interest,” but this could be a generational issue (Van Dine's “Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories” was published when Greeley was an infant). Greeley seems to have known the prescriptive tenets and techniques for writing good mysteries, particularly those involved in the “locked room” variety of howdunits, but perspective and purpose led him to think—and write—outside of the box of tradition.

While Greeley's fiction shows careful plotting, there is no sense of Van Dine's “beautiful murder” (2). Seen from Greeley's perspective, murder is a loss of life and, regardless of the victim's personality or actions, is always tragic and rooted in evil. And, although Greeley pays attention to literary concepts like pacing and suspense, his fiction will never be likened to a game or a sporting event. He writes with a clear-cut purpose and, although his novels are often

humorous, they are never frivolous. Nor will Greeley ever be part of the “guts, guns, and gals” crowd. Bishop Blackie, short and pudgy with coke-bottle glasses, is all brains with no hint of brawn beneath his Chicago Bulls jacket. Additionally, with the exception of sin-obsessed snipers, Greeley’s villains prefer decorative swords, lethal drug overdoses, and explosives to guns. Finally, Greeley doesn’t have “gals” or “femmes fatales” or “gangster’s molls” in his novels. Rather he has exuberant teenagers, saintly youth ministers, and beautiful middle aged lovers.

Greeley’s writing career spanned a remarkable time in Church history. Ordained in 1954, he was a young priest and newly educated sociologist during the troubling years of Vatican II and *Humanae Vitae*. With access to the NORC processes for collecting and analyzing data, he was in a unique position to understand the growing chasm between the Vatican hierarchy and the 900 million Catholics they purportedly served. When shouting and waving spreadsheets failed to wake the sleeping prelates, he turned to the art of storytelling, an esteemed pastime in both his Catholic and Irish heritages. For Greeley, storytelling was not about the fantastical or imaginary. It was, above all, an honored form of truth-telling.

Greeley’s battle with the Curial Goliath lasted for nearly sixty years. While it is unclear that his efforts resulted in doctrinal or policy change in the Vatican, it is clear that he will go down in popular Catholic history as a thorn in the side of the Roman Curia. If nothing else, he made waves. It is hard to ignore a man who writes about foreplay and orgasms while wearing a Roman collar. It’s impossible to ignore a priest intent on dragging a stubbornly antiquated Church into a new world—a world where women have the right to defend their bodies from overuse and not all prelates have penises. Greeley fought his battle with the Catholic Church on many fronts. He spent a significant portion of his life lecturing in front of university classrooms

and turning scraps of sociological data into useful reports. He spent the first three hours of every morning in front of his computer, writing about sex and statistics and returning *mystery* to the realm of the holy.

Greeley's work deserves another look. Literary scholars should recognize his contribution to the mystery genre as going beyond niche. His fiction was transitional, a missing piece of the canon that combined the elements of mystery, social conscience, and religion in a way that was unique at the time of publication, but foreshadowed things to come. Today's genre boundaries are as fluid as readers are eclectic. Harlequin, the world's largest publisher of romance novels, regularly combines love with suspense, mystery, and espionage. Today's fictional detective is often romantically involved, if not married, and marital spats occur more often than gun fights. Readers accustomed to heroines having sex with vampires and long dead Celtic warriors won't blink an eye at Greeley's occasional inclusion of a poltergeist or guardian angel. Today's hard core mystery buffs expect their crime fiction to be relevant to society and look askance at authors who fail to use their novels as a social platform. And once again, enigma belongs to God—at least some of the time.

Greeley's fiction is still relevant to the niche it occupied during the author's lifetime. His core readership—college educated, married, Catholic women in their thirties—are mothers and grandmothers by now, but their daughters and granddaughters are still battling a Church that shames them for using contraceptives and refuses to ordain them. Today's Catholic women need to rediscover the voice of a priest who had their best interests at heart and went to bat for them against the Goliath of the Vatican.

Additionally, Greeley's fiction has outgrown the niche that it occupied when he was alive. There is a new core readership that would enjoy and benefit from Greeley's work, those

who are interested in exploring the world's religions. These seekers are likely to understand that no faith is simple and that multiple perspectives are needed to catch a glimpse of a religion's complexities and possibilities.

And besides, who doesn't enjoy a good mystery?

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