

Sociologist priest: Tales of love sacred or profane?

By James Kushlan

"People have tended to look at the Church through a stained glass window," not seeing it as it really is. Rev. Andrew M. Greeley, Catholic priest, sociologist and novelist, wants to shatter that illusion.

This was the reaction of Dennis Dubs to the work of Fr. Greeley, author of bestselling novels *The Cardinal Sins* and *Thy Brother's Wife*, who addressed an audience of about 300 at Harrisburg Area Community College on November 4. Dubs, Professor of Social Sciences at HACC and moderator of Fr. Greeley's talk, reflects one side in the stir over the value and purpose of Fr. Greeley's controversial novels.

Fr. Greeley, during his talk at HACC, said his novels are stories meant to share what he terms "hope-renewing experiences." Speaking in his role

as sociologist, he said these experiences, the basic element of all religion, are those which give the feeling that there is something beyond death, some purpose in living.

Stories are the best ways of conveying hope-renewing experiences to others, "the best way of talking about God," says Fr. Greeley, adding, "Jesus was a storyteller."

His books, *The Cardinal Sins* and *Thy Brother's Wife*, follow the lives of fictitious Catholic priests, bishops and lay people, often full of desire for worldly success and falling frequently into sexual exploits believed seriously sinful in the Catholic faith.

Kenneth L. Woodward, writing in Newsweek, says Fr. Greeley "insists that his tales of sex-and-ambition-racked priests are parables of God's love for sinful man and that they grew directly out of his prime vocations as priest and sociologist."

Because of his open criticism of members of the Catholic hierarchy, particularly his former archbishop, John Cardinal Cody, the late Archbishop of Chicago, Fr. Greeley has become a controversial figure. His novels have made this epithet all the more secure.

The inside front cover of *The Cardinal Sins* says, "Father Greeley reveals the hierarchy of the Catholic Church as it really is and the priests as the men they really are."

During a question and answer period after his talk at HACC, he said his novels portray the Church and its leaders as imperfect, because the Church is in reality not perfect.

"Imperfect people do not want to belong to a perfect Church," he added.

Rev. David T. McAndrew, a priest of the Catholic Diocese of Harrisburg and pastor of Sacred Heart Church on Cameron St., Harrisburg, rejects Fr. Greeley's appraisal of the novels.



be judged on how well he unifies and uplifts the believers," says Fr. McAndrew. Of the letters sent by readers, Fr. Greeley said seven in eight praised his writing, some readers reporting they had returned to the practice of the Catholic faith.

But Fr. McAndrew says, "The only person I ever heard read one of Fr. Greeley's novels and consider it a parable of belief and an uplifting religious experience is Fr. Greeley."

Fr. McAndrew says Fr. Greeley started putting forth the religious implications of his novels after he was criticized for the money he was making.

According to Mayo Mohs' July 12, 1982 article in *Time*, Fr. Greeley owns a three-bedroom house in Tucson, a beach house on Lake Michigan, and maintains a two-bedroom condominium in Chicago's John Hancock Center. Diocesan priests, such as Fr. Greeley, take no vows of poverty, though.

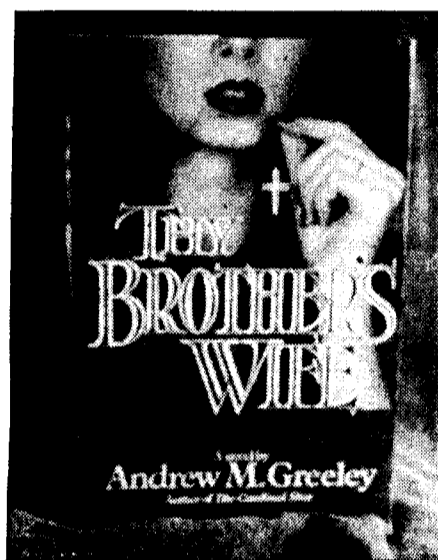
"I don't care how much money he has," says Fr. McAndrew, "but how many people regard these as religious novels?"

The paperback edition of *The Cardinal Sins* bears an afternote explaining the basic purpose of the story, for readers who did not understand. Fr. McAndrew asks, "What other novelist has ever had to put an addition on the second edition of his work to explain the main point, which had apparently been missed by the majority of the readers?"

"This somewhat assumes that the author is the only one with any sense, and the readers are dumb," he says, adding: "Is it not possible that the readers did get the main point, and this is a superficial attempt to draw out what's not there?"

As evidence that the novels are not religious, he points to the characters and asks, "Who ever prays?"

"They're really not religious novels, as far as I'm concerned, except in a very superficial way. The characters wear the clothes," he says, "but that does not make the novels religious."



Because Fr. Greeley identifies himself as a Roman Catholic priest, he says, any evaluation of his work must be based on his identity as priest.

"If a priest is someone who is a center of community for believers, then his work has to

FREE GAS

Share a ride with three friends to Sera-Tec and we will pay for the gas.

CALL 232-1901

For an appointment and additional information

**SERA-TEC
BIOLOGICALS**

260 REILY ST., HARRISBURG

WE ARE OPEN:

Monday-Thursday 8:30 a.m.-7:00 p.m.
Friday 8:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.



Middletown Lanes
944-9991

WEDNESDAY- Campus League Nite
**Ball drilling services, Bags,
Shoes and Accessories**

COME & PAY
US A
VISIT...

**Pedal
Pusher**



**COMPLETE
BICYCLE
SALES & SERVICE**



Fuji.

RALEIGH

NISHIKI

★ WINDSOR ★ RAMPAR MX ★ LOTUS

ONE OF THE LARGEST
SELECTIONS OF BICYCLE
COMPONENTS & ACCESSORIES
IN THE METRO AREA!

652-7760

3788 WALNUT (Rt. 22) HARRISBURG

