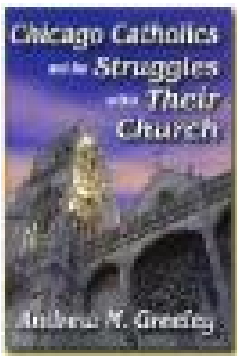


Memories of my brother, Andrew Greeley

Eugene Cullen Kennedy | Oct. 25, 2010 | Bulletins from the Human Side

Perhaps the best news for American Catholics this past week is that of the publication of Fr. Andrew Greeley's *Chicago Catholics and the Struggles Within Their Church*, an analysis that reaffirms the strength of the faith in the archdiocese of Chicago that Greeley has served as a priest and scholar for more than fifty years.

The book was completed by Greeley's colleagues after he sustained serious head injuries two years ago when he was dragged along the ground after his coat got stuck in a taxi door.



[Writing in *The New York Times*](#) [1], James Warren notes that there "has been some

improvement in his condition, but no notion of significant recovery." Greeley looks at the newspapers and scans e-mails, but this man whose drive always matched midday, lives now in twilight and visitors report that they are not sure what he sees or hears.

This is like a biblical incident in which a good man is suddenly and tragically blinded or made mute so that only the touch of Jesus' hand can set him free again.

There is no doubt that the Lord's hand rests on Andrew's wounded forehead.

We are in fact the blind ones here because we cannot read the truth of what is happening. Andrew sees past us now, freed from the grip of time that holds us stiffly in place, into the depths of the eternal that was the subject of his life's work and the glory of his destiny.

In this quiet interval I count the many years and the many ways I knew Andrew and of how I finally got to know him best.

It was hard not to know him, of course, because of his achievements as a priest, writer, teacher, and, as he confessed to me his ambition just before we both turned 40, savant -- a word that means a learned scholar and wise man. It's a title he has long since earned.

How did you know Andrew Greeley?

As a successful novelist who instructed and entertained millions of readers? As a sociologist of religion who always found the glass of data half filled when so many others saw it half empty? As a public speaker with

enough Irish charm to turn the Chicago river green without any help from the men who pour dye into it every March 17th? As a columnist with ideas about men and events that alternately inspired and infuriated you? As a frequent guest on radio and television whenever a sensible opinion on things Catholic was needed?

Remembering his many incarnations, nobody will ever be able to say: "Andy, we hardly knew ye."

It seems only yesterday that he and I were young priests together. And it seems only a little after that when he was celebrating his 25th anniversary of ordination at a great South Side gathering.

Many great people came for that event, including his good friend the late Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who fixed his blue eyes on my own blue eyes and spoke the only sentence he ever addressed to me: "Where did you get that drink?"

Such was the kind of merriment Andrew longed to provide as a dividend to his friendship.

Andrew and I were born in the same year, along with theologians Hans Kung and Johannes Metz, historian Martin Marty, and, yes, Shirley Temple. Thinking of this group but addressing Greeley, I once quoted Franklin D. Roosevelt's words to Winston Churchill: "It's fun being in the same decade with you."

Many will nod as I describe our relationship as that of Irish brothers.

Irish brothers, as you may know, love each other deeply. They stick together in the long run. The problem, of course, is the short run. For, if in another of Andrew's favorite quotations, it can be said of the Irish that "all their wars are merry and all their songs are sad," then it can also be said that the closest of Irish brothers can fall into the deepest of estrangements, the worst of battles, and the stoniest of silences.

And so it came to pass for us.

I will get to that in a moment. First, let me tell you of my memories of my brother Andrew from a thousand adventures.

We were comrades-in-arms in the grand battles for renewal of the church after Vatican II. We took a memorable speaking tour of the Orient in which, among other things, we shared accommodations in a Japanese inn with boiling lava in the backyard and in South Korean digs with a steaming garbage dump in the same place.

For a man who did not disguise his preference for Hiltons, Andrew made an heroic effort to adjust to these missionary environments. I can still see him standing, however, in his Japanese garb and slippers, studying the fifty foot buffet of various kinds of seaweed -- perplexed for one of the first times in his life. He settled for a boiled egg and a glass of milk.

And I recall one special lecture at a Japanese university.

It was June. It was warm and the windows were open. I had lectured first and the sun was just setting as Andrew began to speak. Within a few moments creatures -- everything but Godzilla -- began to fly through the window and attack him. He stared them down, batted them away, waved them off -- somewhat like King Kong under attack on the Empire State Building. And he did it with good humor and an Irish twinkle in his eye.

But let's get to our falling out for this is the tale I would share with you.

In the tradition of all real Irish brothers we entered a place where the trade winds of friendship died down and we drifted almost out of each other's sight, if not out of the sound of each other's voices.

Regrettable, one felt, remembering all the good, but what could or would be done about it?

It was Andrew who did something about it and in that moment I came to see him more clearly than I ever had before.

I do not know how he learned that I had prostate cancer and was in Chicago's Northwestern Hospital, but I do know that the day after my surgery -- as my wife and I sat quietly in my hospital room, still stunned and sorting out the sudden turn of events -- Andrew appeared at the door and entered with the greatest gift a man could give.

It was one that took a great man to give it. For, it was the healing gift of reconciliation, expressed as the Irish -- usually so in love with words -- express it best: by the deed, by the gift outright of himself, by slaying the dragon of misunderstanding and wordlessly making us brothers again.

How well do you know Andrew Greeley? I thought that I knew him very well until that November morning when I got to know him as I would like to celebrate him now. For Andrew, now sitting quietly gazing beyond time after fifty years a priest and a dozen other callings fulfilled along the way, revealed himself that day as what we would all long to be -- a Christian to his depths and a light to the world.

How well do you know Andrew Greeley, my Irish brother and friend, who remained that all through those years of estrangement that seemed as long and uninviting as that Japanese buffet?

He had driven away the demons as he did the invaders who flew through the window of that university on the other side of the world.

And it is Andrew my brother of whom I sing during this Vesper time in which he is not trapped, but from which he has worked himself free enough to see all the way to the mountain ranges of the Mystery of Eternity -- whose foothills he mapped for the rest of us in his life and work.

[Eugene Cullen Kennedy is emeritus professor of psychology at Loyola University, Chicago.]

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