COMMUNAL CATHOLICISM: ANALYSIS OF GREELY'S THESIS

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THE ARGUMENT

This is a critique of the "Communal Catholic" thesis as put forward by Andrew Greeley in numerous works. It is a thesis analyzable from several vantage points. It is an ideological, socio-cultural and social-psychological analysis of American Catholicism (Varacalli & Haynor, 1981). Greeley's thesis is an exercise in sociological forecasting. His central thesis appears most clearly presented in his *Communal Catholic: A Personal Manifesto*. His central thesis is that in light of forces at play both inside and outside of the organizational Church, a new type of American Catholic is emerging. As Greeley puts it: (1976,a) "A communal Catholic is committed to Catholicism and self-conscious in his attempt to understand the Catholic experience in the U.S. He does not care much what the Church as an institution says or does not say, does or does not do. He is committed to Catholicism as a collectivity and as a worldview although he reserves the right to interpret that worldview to meet his own needs."

The causes for this development within the American Catholic character typology, for Greeley, involve a particular combination of "external" and "internal" considerations, of forces at work in both the outer society and within the Church. The former involve two great social transitions, that from a "counter-reformation" to an "ecumenical" age and that from an "immigrant" to "professional suburb" American Catholic Churches. The latter involves the "intellectual and religious bankruptcy" of the hierarchial and top-level leadership of a Church that has supposedly failed to respond adequately to the needs of a changing Catholic constituency in a changing age. Greeley says: "No one is listening to the Church as an institution . . . because it is almost totally innocent of ideas. In a literate community with dramatic change occurring, he who has no ideas has no influence." (1976:7).

This emergence and future growth of a new group of Catholics signals, the precipitous decline of Catholicism as an ecclesiastical institutional or organized structure in the United States. American Catholicism, Greeley argues, is moving from an institutional and ecclesiastical base to a non-institutional and non-ecclesiastical base. The argument is that until relatively recently, American Catholicism was equatable with the Catholic Church, grounded foremost in an extensive complex of highly specific normative requirements, dogmas, and activities promulgated and administered by an ecclesiastical hierarchy. This includes the hierarchy, the priesthood, the religious orders, the various institutions which are administered by these groups such as schools, orphanages, hospitals, charitable institutions, associated lay organizations, newspapers, magazines and a host of "subsidiary institutions". For Greeley, such a development is concomitant with that of a healthy increase in the self-consciousness and self-awareness of the American Catholic collectivity. An "associative" American Catholicism wanes while a "communal" Catholicism waxes. By Parsonian terminology, American Catholicism is becoming a more "cultural" phenomenon and less a "social" phenomenon. Primacy is shifting from the normative dimension to the symbolic dimension. Increasingly, American Catholicism is interpretable as a world-view, as a perspective on reality.

Not only is American Catholicism as an object of sociological analysis moving in such a direction, but so are Catholics as individuals. There is a characterological shift accompaning the structural shift. Catholic identity is decreasingly derived from one's attachment to the ecclesiastical context. Rather, Catholic identity is largely reflected in commitment to a Catholic world-view. The shift from an "ecclesiastic" to what Greeley calls "communal" Catholicism possesses both socio-cultural and social-psychological implications.

While Greeley's nomenclature is taken from Weber's "communal-associative" distinction, it is clear that his central thesis is quite compatible with Herberg's (1955) "triple melting pot" hypothesis to the effect that it is one's religious location that "mediates" one's existence to the broader "collective conscience".

That the communal Catholic is self-conscious and self-selective in his affiliation with his Catholic tradition is derived from Allport's (1950) discussion of "intrinsic" or "mature" religiosity. Greeley's understanding that "organized" religion may be losing at least some of it's hold without any noticeable loss in the religious sensibilities of the individual is indebted to Troeltsch's (1960) and Parsons (1960).

The ecclesiastic-communal distinction pertains to the degree to which American Catholicism is "institutional" or "organizational." Greeley also considers intellectualism. Three subgroupings within the American Catholic population are delineated; (1) fideistic anti-intellectualists; (2) romantic anti-intellectualists and (3) intellectualists. The fideistic anti-intellectualists are those within the "institutional" church who support the principle of traditional Church authority. The romantic anti-intellectualists are quided in their world-view by feeling, emotion, sensitivity, the drive for self-fulfillment, ideological purity, and moralism. The intellectualists are Catholics guided by the search for truth, sensitive to the consequences of various alternatives and cognizant of the need for cooperation, pluralism, gradualism and dispassion. Greeley contends that the institutional Church is being captured by the romantics, who become the resident intelligentsia., with the tacit cooperation of the traditionalists, in spite of their small numbers within the total American Catholic community. These three groups constitute contending factions, and ideal-typical Catholic character orientations. Traditionalism, romanticism, and intellectualism as discussed by Greeley posses both socio-cultural and social-psychological dimensions.

CHARACTEROLOGICAL DIMENSION

According to Greeley the "ecclesiastic" Catholic took for granted the commands of the Church, relying and depending on the Church as the only true source of legitimation of conduct. What legitimates conduct for the "communal" Catholic? The source becomes the Catholic world-view as reflectively and self-consciously interpreted by individual Catholics. This paralles Parsons' concept of "value generalization." Catholicism has been "generalized" beyond specific normative requirements, thereby becoming potentially relevant in a wider range of conduct and activity. The burden falls to the individual Catholic to determine the appropriate implementation of the Catholic world-view into each context. The shift to "communal" Catholicism represents both a decline in "taken for grantedness", and a heightened degree of individual responsibility. As portrayed by Greeley, the "Communal" Catholic, rather than constituting a transitional type in the direction of secularization subscribes to a broader, more diffuse form of Catholicism. The difference between the "ecclesiastical" and "communal" Catholic can be seen by analyzing their respective (1) source of legitimation and (2) source of interpretation. (Haynor and Varacalli, 1981).

Greeley's application of some of the generally accepted notions of modern day religiosity to the fascinating case of American Catholicism is both creative and long overdue. We criticize Greeley's thesis not for its fundamental outlook but for the vagueness and indiscriminate nature of the concept he tries to develop.

There is no argument that Greeley's communal Catholic has had his/her personality shaped in *some* way and that Catholicism provides *some* sort of guidance for his/her personal problems. But he fails to delineate some of the various orientations or multiple responses of contemporary individuals to their American Catholicism. By lumping many "residual" categories together Greeley misses an opportunity to provide a conceptual scaffold from which to analyze the variegated modes of response to an increasingly pluralistic Church.

We feel compelled to offer a few clues to just how one would go about such a task. A starting point might be the use of Fichter's typology of four kinds of Catholics (1951). He classified Catholics as *nuclear, modal, marginal* or *dormant* depending upon their participation in prescribed rituals of mass, confession and parochial education for children. This conceptual apparatus has potential use in Greeley's discussion, with an image of concentric circles extending from an *eccelesiatically defined* Church center. Greeley's communal Catholics ought to be found somewhere within the Catholic ecclesiastical periphery. But where? Is one to lump indiscriminately the various peripheral alternatives to an eccelesiastical Catholicism together? Are the intellectually ar-

ticulate to be joined with the "tongue-tied"? Are those working-class Catholics who have their religion mediated through either their ethnicity, family, or neighborhood to be collapsed in the same category as those more middle-class professional Catholics whose Catholicism is made real in both thought and activity through the broader symbol system of the nation?

We suggest that the next step involves the utilization of a more explicitly *multi-dimensional* approach. While many such approaches have been created in the sociology of religion, two attempts stand out. 1) Gerhard Lenski (1981) delineates four types of "religious commitment", which he calls *associational* involvement or how often Church is attended; *communal* involvement or whether or not one's "significant others" are also members of one's socio-religious group; *doctrinal* orthodoxy or degree of assent to the doctrines of one's church and *devotionalism* or frequency of private prayer or communion with God. 2) Glock and Stark's (1965) five ways in which an individual may be religious. These modes are labeled the *ritualist,* the *ideological,* the *experiential*, the *intellectual* and the *consequential*. The multi-dimensional approach makes clear that it is quite possible to be religious in one way without being religious in others. But Greeley's "communal Catholics" could *not* be placed in concentric circles around an ecclesiastical nucleus. The image is now truly multi-dimensional, with Catholics located variously in multi-dimensional space.

SOCIO-CULTURAL DIMENSION

The criticism levelled against Greeley's notion of the "communal" Catholic as a model character type can be extended to the socio-cultural level. American Catholics are multi-dimensionally approached, and American Catholicism is a macro-sociological phenomenon.

Greeley's tripartite division of American Catholicism into the three rival camps of fideistic anti-intellectualists, romantic anti-intellectualists and intellectualists is useful, not in the sense that these pure types really exist, but to the extent that it delineates various interests, perspectives and postures within the American Catholic community.

Participation as Catholics is strongly mediated by participation in the institutional church. One's Catholic identity is strongly based on a "taken for granted" faith in a transcendent, objective realm. Primacy must be placed on individual salvation and Catholicism must be wary of secular involvements and movements. The purity of Catholic dogma must be maintained, because syncretism with other intellectual systems entails contamination and ultimate liquidation. For the fideistic anti-intellectualist, allegiance to Catholicism is best demonstrated through obedience and conformity to Church authority and tradition.

The romantic anti-intellectualist shares with the fideistic anti-intellectualist an aversion to the rational scruntiny of religious faith. But church authority as a vehicle for religious expression, is displaced by the passion and experience of the individual Catholic. It is the major objective of the Catholic to eradicate the evil that is perceived to exist in the social world. The "romantic" interprets religious conduct in terms of the realization of the "good society", characterized by social justice, dignity and equality. The romantic's sensitivity to the injustices of an evil society results in feelings and emotions of indignation and sentiment. A "therapeutic" view of social policy is adopted, one which entails amelioration of oppressive social conditions by state intervention. A position of moral absolutism is embraced by the romantic for no compromise with evil forces can be tolerated.

If romantic Catholicism derives its substenance from the "heart," intellectual Catholicism derives its from the "head". A simplisitic division of the world into "good and "bad" is rejected. Such a view of human nature and human society leads the intellectualist to seek incremental and cooperative adjustments to social problems. Greeley labels such an approach to social policy "communal" as opposed; to "therapeutic" or "utilitarian." High value is placed by the intellectualist on the maintenance of pluralism, localism and primary group networks. The notion of the "welfare state" as a panacea is vehemently questioned. A more benevolent view of human nature enables the intellectualist to entrust responsibility to a wide range of viable, solidaristic groupings. The "intellectual" Catholic places a premium on the integration of individuals into what Durkheim referred to as "intermediate institutions" and Berger and

Neuhaus have termed "mediating structures". Substituted for the moral absolutism of the "romantic" is the consequential ethics of the intellectualist. Human action must be judged in terms of its effect and impact on other individuals and groups. Flexibility is considered a virtue, rigidity a vice. Each situation must be judged on its own merits. Society must avoid imposing a standard solution to each and every circumstance. Pragmatism is considered to be a more efficacious strategy than self-righteous indignation. The "intellectuals" interpretation of Catholicism is in part a function of the dialogue entered into with other intellectual systems, particularly the social sciences. Such an influence leads the intellectual to be more sensitive to the search for "truth", to strategies that will work and can be implemented and to socio-cultural relativity than is the "romantic". Such knowledge and rationality is seen as serving to enlighten, not contaminate or undermine.

What Greely provides as an undaunted intellectualist is the perception by the faction of the shortcomings of the other two factions. The fideistic anti-intellectualists are narrowly pragmatic and shortsighted. The romantics are self-hating and overly-emotional. Both are intellectually simplistic, imitative, derivative, shallow, bankrupt and naive. What Greeley presents as "the" Catholic worldview is in fact his version of intellectual Catholicism. A narrow "intellectualism" is just as capable of being unthinkingly dogmatic and ideological as any other world-view.

It is true that strong elements of "romantic anti-intellectualism" have located themselves within the national level Catholic bureaucracy, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops/ the United States Catholic Conference. But he ignores the fact that this group is characterized by cross-cutting solidarities with the intellectualistic and fideistic groupings. He overstates the degree to which there are irreconcibible ideological cleavages within American Catholicism.

VIABILITY OF NON-INSTITUTIONAL CATHOLICISM

A major criticism of Greeley's "Communal Catholic" thesis lies contradictory statements regarding the future vitality of American Catholicism given the decline of an ecclesiastically defined Catholicism. Is a communal Catholicism a viable proposition without at least some active allegiance to an associative Catholicism? Greeley answers as follows (1976,7):

"Will the Catholic Church in the U.S. come to an end? It most assuredly will not — unless one is so foolish to believe that what the leaders and spokesman of an ecclesiastical institution say has much impact on the religious faith of ordinary people. American Protestant denominations have flourished for years, decades, even centuries with their institutional organizations having far less impact on the ordinary congregants than the American Catholic Church presently has. Still there is no evidence that Protestant denominations are going out of business . . ."

We acknowledge the usefulness of Greeley pointing out the persistence of American Catholic tradition. Greeley's work, best exemplified in his *Unsecular Man,* (1972) has justifiably been recognized as a useful corrective to a basically "gemeinschaft-gesellschaft" secularization theory that simply posits primary and secondary group attachments in a "zero-sum" relationship. But Greeley woefully neglects *the* fundamental question regarding the "realness" attributed to any set of symbols, religious or otherwise, and it's transferal across generations. THis seminal question was, of course, first brought up by Weber through his discussion of the "routinization of charisma" as evidenced through the eparture of the last of the first generation disciples of the original charismatic leader. This insight has been expanded upon by Berger and Luckmann *Construction of Reality* (1967) through their discussion of "legitimation" in the section entitled "Society as Objective Reality".

CONCLUSION

Greeley's typical liberal optimisim regarding the staying power of Catholic tradition in American society may be at least partially misplaced. Might not the communal Catholic of the 1970's mark an "intermediate" stage of decline for an American Catholicism that is awaiting the ushering in of new generations of ecclesiastically uninfluenced Catholics which may greatly accelerate the rate of decline? Without a viable ecclesiastical structure who will "explain" and "justify" to the new generat-

ions the "necessity" of the Catholic tradition as one's frame of reference? The "alienation" of the *present-day* communal Catholic from his ecclesiastical organization is less radical than Greeley would have us believe. The communal Catholic of today was obviously influenced, by the very organized structure he "rejects". *Future* communal Catholics, without the benefit of a "priestly-prophetic", ecclesiastical-community exchange may be equally indifferent to their Catholic heritage without any creative relationship. Greeley's assertion that the relatively less organized Protestant denominations, moreover, "have flourised for centuries with their institutional organizations having far less impact on the ordinary congregants than the American Catholic Church" seems dubious.

The issue of viability must also be viewed on both the social-psychological and socio-cultural levels. We can speak of the continued "plausibility" of an non-institutional Catholicism in the consciousness of individual Catholics. Socioculturally, we can speak of the impact on the larger society of a non-institutional Catholicism.

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RATCLIFF (From p 53)

We have examined several 1981 marriage and family tests to assess the degree to which texts are changing in their coverage of human sexuality. While there is an increase in space allotted to sexual information and there are more graphic pictures than in the majority of past texts, overall, the information is not as detailed as Sample B which most teachers preferred. A functional marriage and family text with explicit coverage is rare.

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