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The Church 1976



Fr. Andrew Greeley

Anyone who tries to take a serious look at the history of American Catholicism is struck by the long string of remarkable women who have kept the American church going. You wonder why so little attention has been paid, for example, to Maria Kaupas and Francesca Cabrini.

I guess a lot of it has to do with our early years in Catholic schools. We heard so much from the "good sisters" about their "holy founder" that these latter august personages took on a mythological aura. Of course they were remarkable people, sister said so. But they weren't people like us. They belonged in the same category as Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, and the Easter Bunny.

Poor Francesca Cabrini was safely pigeon-holed as a saint. That made her doubly unreal, and you could readily exclude her from the history books, and your own thinking. What could be more irrelevant than a saint?

So we took it for granted that such women could start out with virtually nothing and build large communities with numerous institutions providing a wide variety of indispensable services. So what else is new? So Maria Kaupas was smuggled across the Russian border at 16 — quite literally running from soldiers — and within a few years would found a religious community which at the time of her death would number more than 500 members. But what have the sisters of St. Casimir done for us lately?

But as I continue my "Critic"-inspired search for the meaning of American Catholicism, I wonder why we don't take these women more seriously than we do. They were not feminists, of course (and we must judge the past by our standards and by the rhetorical fashions of the present, must we not?), though heaven knows, no man pushed Kaupas or Cabrini around — not twice anyhow. They issued few statements and certainly no un-negotiable demands. They did not insist that they be ordained priests (though it was a shame they were not); they did not sound angry, hateful, or strident; they were not militants.

All they did was attract thousands of young women to follow them in what were almost always difficult and uncomfortable tasks, and frequently dangerous and, in the case of early Mercy Sisters, deadly assignments.

Alas for them, they are no longer

APPRECIATION

Dryden — Father Thomas Cleary, pastor, and the parishioners of Holy Cross recently expressed their deep appreciation to Mr. Harold Huntley for 23 years of service to the parish.

Huntley has served as organist and choir director for the church and worked with other children interested in music. He has also designed and published many church publications. Huntley was the layout man for Wilcox Press, in Ithaca, before retirement.

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relevant. The habits are gone, nuns can smoke and drink and tell dirty jokes just like priests. They can stay out as late as they want and go wherever they want, and protest as much as they want.

Isn't progress wonderful?

Look, sisters, don't get me wrong. I support all the changes. So does the majority of everyone else in the country — as much as the absence of opposition may offend you. Casimira Kaupas would have been every bit as effective in lay garb as she was in the habit — though I suspect she would have worn some sign that she was a nun, and would not have been hesitant or reluctant to be so identified. She certainly wouldn't have thought such identification was a barrier to "relating" to people.

My point is different. These "old-fashioned" women who founded your communities attracted followers. They may have been out of date, irrelevant, not with it, but they still attracted followers.

You, of course, are up to date, relevant, advanced, with it, but you don't attract followers.

And if I were in your shoes that would scare the living daylights out of me. Minimally, I would want to question some of my assumptions.

Maybe your militant feminism is not the wave of the future after all. But then what is?

Maybe the founders knew a secret that you've forgotten.

Deaths

Helen M. Kildea

Helen Meagher Kildea, widow of Charles Kildea, died March 28, 1976. The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated March 31 at St. Jude's Church by Father John Steger.

Mrs. Kildea, retired, was a member of the Taylor-Sybron Quarter Century Club. She was a graduate of St. Bridget's School and Nazareth Academy.

Survivors include a son, John, who is a sergeant in the Brighton Police Department; a daughter, Mrs. Eileen Barber, and six grandchildren; a brother, Dr. Patrick J. Meagher, two sisters, Mrs. John Donlon and Miss Elizabeth Meagher, and several nieces and nephews.

FUND DRIVE

The Rochester Community Players have launched a capital fund drive, with a goal of \$50,000 to pay their share of the \$120,000 cost of equipping the theater in the Elaine Percy Wilson Center at the Harley School. The limited capacity of the old theater on South Clinton Ave. and the increasing maintenance cost have made the move, which will take place in the fall, necessary, according to Arthur J. Zuckerman, president of the Players.

Donations can be sent to Rochester Community Players, Inc., 820 South Clinton Ave., Rochester 14620.

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