

Father Greeley offers upbeat message about marriage

"Sex: The Catholic Experience," by Father Andrew Greeley; Thomas More (Chicago, 1994); 167 pp.; \$19.95.

Reviewed by Mary Kenny
Catholic News Service

"Sex: The Catholic Experience" is a positive, optimistic, even happy book about Catholic marriage. Father Andrew Greeley, priest-sociologist, this time turns his attention to Catholic behavior and attitudes in matters of sex.

As such the book is about more than marriage. He also deals with sex and the single Catholic, using research from earlier decades. And in his discussion of sexual abuse by priests he distinguishes facts from opinion.

But it is Father Greeley's research on attitudes and behavior of married peo-



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ple which is the most interesting and inspiring part of this book.

Using current data from the National Opinion Research Center, where he is a senior director, Father Greeley reports the following findings: "1) Catholics are significantly more likely to have sex weekly or more often than all others (religious groups) combined ... 2) Catholics are one-quarter again more likely than others to have sex at least once a week when they are 55 or older ... 3) Catholics — especially Catholic women — score significantly higher on the sexual playfulness scale."

How, readers wonder, are these findings possible when the church is usually pictured as negative on sex, stressing misbehavior if discussing sex at all?

Father Greeley suggests that Catholicism functions on two levels. "The High Tradition is the Catholicism one learns in schools, ... the teaching of theologians and the magisterium. It is cognitive, propositional, didactic. ... The Popular Tradition is contained in the teaching of parents, family, neighbors and friends. It is imaginative, experiential, narrative."

The popular tradition on married love teaches us "that sexual pleasure heals the frictions and conflicts of the common life and reinforces the bond between husband and wife." Father Greeley suggests that a refreshingly large number of Catholics understand the positive, joyful, playful, bonding delight

of sexual love. They do so, moreover, not only in the early years of marriage, but throughout their lives.

The findings suggest that married Catholics in substantial numbers have found the secret of joyful, bonded, lasting married love. They do not divorce, not because the church says divorce is wrong, but because they are passionately in love with each other.

Church leaders, Father Greeley suggests, need to look to married Catholics to explore further the real bonds of marriage, the real meaning of sacramental love.

Mary Kenny is co-author of several books on marriage and family life and of the CNS column "Family Talk."

Available at your bookstore or order prepaid from Thomas More Publishing, 205 W. Monroe St., Chicago, Ill. 60606. Add \$2 for shipping and handling.



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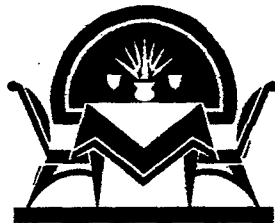
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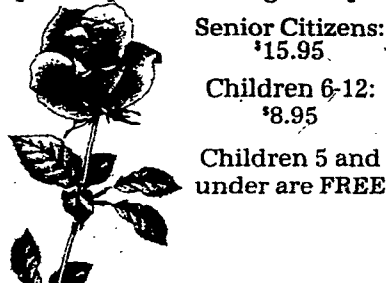
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