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A modern Adam and Eve re-enter paradise

Eugene Cullen Kennedy | Oct. 25, 2011 Bulletins from the Human Side

They would never have thought about themselves in this way. In fact, they didn't think much about themselves at all. That is what made them both great and good at the same time, a combination that is elusive in what we might call the Age of the Drone that refers not to silent airborne weapons that blow people up suddenly, but to the grating windblown political pundits who bore people to death slowly.

I refer to Sr. Anita Caspary and Marty Hegarty, who broke free of the shackles of time within a few days of each other, symbolizing a fresh incarnation of Adam and Eve for our time. They were cast out of the institutional Garden of the highly clericalized Eden of pre-Vatican I American Catholicism.

Marty, a distinguished Chicago priest who embodied the spirit of Vatican II, had to leave because the clerical garden had no room for him after he fell in love with his beloved Carole. The then reigning, emphasis on *reigning*, archbishop, John Cardinal Cody, who took no prisoners, thought that former priests, like Old Testament scapegoats, should be driven out to wither in the wilderness to spare Chicago from their bad influence.

Sr. Anita was the distinguished head of the Immaculate Heart Order of nuns after serving as president of their Los Angeles College. She also embodied the spirit of Vatican II, but, because she implemented the modernization of religious life that the Council had urged, was barred, along with her community, from teaching in the Los Angeles Catholic schools by the then-reigning, underscore the emphasis on *reigning*, archbishop, James Francis Cardinal McIntyre, who might have been inclined to shoot prisoners in his determined suppression of any Vatican II transformation of religious life that he viewed as the moral equivalent of *The Russians Are Coming*.

Marty remained in Chicago, as did many former priests, while Cody railed from his North Side mansion whose tables, chairs and sofas sagged under bags of unopened mail. That 19-chimneyed edifice was chronically dark, sparking wagers about whether Cody paid his electric bill or lived somewhere else. For Cody, no fate was bad enough for ex-priests, whom he urged employers not to hire and with whom, as I can tell you from my own experience, he refused even to shake hands at a casual meeting.

Marty not only remained in Chicago, but he remained to the end of his days a true priest. He also worked as an industrial psychologist, but he somehow found time to establish an organization, WEORC, the Old English for *work*, that served as an exchange and a network to find jobs for men and women who had left the ministry or other Church work. He not only undermined the Cardinal's efforts to keep ex-priests from finding employment in Chicago (I add parenthetically that he vainly tried to get the valiant then-president of Loyola University to fire me) but created an organization that, although he turned it over to others, is still operating today.

One can sing joyful songs of Marty's work as a mediator, ever helping others to reconcile or keep in touch, but mournful strains arise from the declining conflicted years of poor Cardinal Cody, who would have succeeded imperially if he had become archbishop of Chicago in 1935 instead of 1965, and who died alone with a hired nurse in attendance after enduring stormy years of newspaper investigations into his finances. That his

successor, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, opened the books to prove the charges wrong came too late to comfort him in his beleaguered last years.

Sr. Anita was attacked by Cardinal McIntyre, who brought his earlier businessman's experience to his shrewd balancing the books and building the physical plant of the Los Angeles archdiocese after World War II. He had no patience, however, for anyone, bishop, priest or nun, who dared to exercise the new freedom to function in the modern world encouraged by Vatican II. McIntyre wanted to force a priest he thought rebellious to go through a medieval ceremony recanting his modest independence by ceremonially kissing the cardinalatial shoe.

He also hounded the late Bishop James P. Shannon, one of the brightest and most able of American bishops, into resignation after Shannon had discussed the possibility of questioning such disciplines as celibacy on a nationally televised program on the Church. In a swift strike against the Immaculate Heart Sisters, who had served for decades in their teaching mission in Los Angeles, he cut them loose rather than tolerate them as independent and educationally qualified women who were more dedicated to the Church as a people than to the Church as an organization.

McIntyre, whose career, dedicated to circling the same dusty track despite fiery crashes and multicar pileups now and then, was not prepared to deal with the valiant woman, Anita Caspary, who led 300 sisters, after they lost an appeal to Rome, to seek release from their vows and to form an independent ecumenical group to carry on their work. McIntyre fulminated, but there was nothing he could do to interfere with Anita Caspary's readiness to leave the institutional Eden for the real world outside. The community continues today with 160 members.

Marty and Anita lived out a contemporary version of the Myth of the Garden. The difference is that they did not sin but were sinned against and were driven into exile not because they wanted to be like gods but because they wanted to serve God's people with goodness and purity of heart. Which of these, do you think, went home to Heaven justified: Marty Hegarty, who did so much good, or Cardinal Cody, who had fantasies that Marty could only work harm? Anita Caspary, who freely and bravely gave up the shield of the institution that tried to eclipse her work, or Cardinal McIntyre, who was willing to drive the healthiest of his flock off the grazing lands he preserved for the institution that, tragically, has since suffered the devastation visited on the clerical culture whose hidden unhealthiness he never understood or ignored?

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