

Photos by Anthony J. Costello

Father Fenton delivered a hard-hitting attack not only on many of the present-day practices of the Church, but also on her leaders.

Bircher Priest Hits Today's Church, Pope

By CARMEN VIGLUCCI

Many in the crowd of more than 400 who attended a talk last week in Rochester by Father Francis E. Fenton, billed as a member of the Orthodox Roman Catholic Movement, probably expected a traditional point of view of Church affairs.

In a sense they heard that but they may have been surprised to also hear diatribes against the bishops of the United States, the president, several cardinals, key advisers in the Vatican and the Holy Father himself.

And the only announcement of Father Fenton's coming, an ad in the Sunday, Nov. 6 Democrat and Chronicle, did not reveal that the priest is also a member of the national council of the John Birch Society. Nor could many guess in advance that a goodly portion of his talk would be about the Communist menace to this country, since there was no hint of that in the ad announcing his talk at the Holiday Inn near the airport.

According to a diocesan source, Father Fenton has his problems with his home diocese of Bridgeport, Conn. He is listed in the Catholic Directory as "absent on leave." Reportedly Bishop Walter W. Curtis has asked him to return but he has refused and is considered a "disobedient priest."

A spokesman for this diocese, Father Douglas Hoffman,

director of Pastoral Ministry, said Father Fenton "lacks sponsorship of any office in this diocese" and "did not have the courtesy to inform the bishop of his intention to speak here."

At the talk, Robert Lynch who introduced Father Fenton said he was one of a group of lay people who over a cup of coffee decided to ask him (Father Fenton) in.

Father Fenton did address some of the concerns of Catholic traditionalists, such as the New Order of the Mass, Communion in the Hand, the charismatic movement but mostly he used his hour or so to unleash strong rhetoric against Church and government figures.

He said that the vernacular Mass is a "total disaster" and said he favors the Latin Tridentine Mass. He made it clear, however, that it is not the language of the Mass that is the key issue in his view but rather the New Order which he characterized as "ambiguous" and "sacrilegious."

Calling the New Order "a false form of worship" which Roman Catholics are forbidden to attend, he advised those in his hearing not to attend Mass unless it was the Tridentine rite. A blank was provided for people to sign after the speech to gather numbers to support such a Mass equidistant from Rochester and Buffalo, "perhaps in Batavia."

"Am I saying to you not to attend the New Mass?" he asked.

"Yes, I am — it's a false form of worship... a caricature of the Holy Sacrifice."

He also decried what he feels is the Church abandonment of the rosary, benediction and other practices "in favor of ecumenism... trading pulpits with Protestant ministers and Jewish rabbis is the 'in' thing."

He criticized Communion in the Hand because "it tarnishes the body of Christ" and because it provides hosts for Satanists to use in their black Masses. "Satanists," he said, "at least believe in the presence of Christ which is more than I can say about some half-baked priests around the country."

In addition to expressing his personal brand of traditionalist views, Father Fenton also had bitter comments on people, places and things in the public eye. For instance:

FATHER CHARLES CURRAN — "It kills me to call these characters father."

FATHER ROBERT DRINAN — "Masquerades behind a Roman collar in Congress... a former member of the National Lawyers Guild, identified as a Communist front... that despicable character."

FATHER THEODORE HESBURGH — "That knucklehead out in Notre Dame... another prize."

PRESIDENT CARTER — "That phony in the White House... that Bible-toting hypocrite."

CARDINAL LEO SUEENIS — "That swinging charismatic... the top banana of the Catholic charismatics."

CARDINALS CESAROLI, VILLOT (Vatican secretary of state), BUGNINI — "Among 17 cardinals and bishops who are members of the Freemasons... devoted to destroying the Church and all governments."

ARCHBISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN — "Not the man he was 20 years ago."

JOSEPH CALIFANO, secretary of HEW — "Another despicable Catholic."

UNITED STATES — "A cesspool of filth."

VATICAN II — "Soft on communism."

THE KEPT PRESS — "You don't get the truth, you get the current propaganda line."

CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT — "Weird phenomenon."

THE U.S. BISHOPS — "Some have lost their faith. Some are enemy agents, to carry out assigned parts... but vast majority are simply cowards. Even the best of them are pillars of jelly."

BISHOP JOSEPH L. HOGAN — He spoke of "heretics who masquerade as bishops and priests... you have a lulu in this diocese, I understand."

But the bitterest pill for many in the audience came with the priest's attacks on Pope Paul.

"Since it has not been conclusively proven that he is not legitimate, I must accept that he is... this enigma that is Pope Paul."

He had alluded to the Holy Father earlier in his talk. The Pope, he said, will not meet with traditional Catholics but "has met with well-known Communists on several occasions... the Vatican is palsy-walsy with international criminal Communists."

Calling the United Nations "that Godless monstrosity in New York conceived by Communists, created by Communists and run by Communists," he added that "the Pope called it the world's greatest hope... God help us. I thought the Roman Catholic Church was."

Someone in the getting-restless audience said aloud, "I thought God was."

He also advised traditionalists to leave the Church because "sincere Catholics who are going to fight from within — their latest defeat is Communion in the Hand — are going to lose."

"Faith," he said, "is greater than obedience. I always obey (but) when it means destruction of my faith, I draw the line on obedience. It's all or nothing. Either we fight it all the way or we forget it."

In a question period following the talk, a woman assailed the speaker. Speaking of the suffering of Pope Paul, she said, "Father, it is men like you who make him suffer."

She attempted to say more but was shut off by Father Fenton and emcee Lynch with "this is not a public forum." A man raced down the aisle to support the woman verbally and he, too, was cut off.

ALL IN THE FAMILY



Sarah Child

Every time I pick up my Webster's Collegiate Dictionary I think of Sister Romaine, my freshman English teacher at Villa Maria College in Erie, Pa.

It was Sister who instilled in me the realization that if I were to be abandoned on a desert island with only a couple of books to fulfill, enlighten and entertain me over a period of years, Webster's Collegiate would most definitely be one of them.

Some 20 years later I'm still inclined to agree with her.

Villa Maria is staffed by the St. Joseph Order and Sister Romaine was what is now termed one of "the old breed of nuns."

I teared her and admired her with equal passion and eventually came to love her although I turned my back on that restrictive female ghetto after one year and fled to far more liberal Franciscan halls of coed learning.

In my hometown parish we were literally too poor to have nuns. Later on when a much younger brother and sister reached school age our pastor was able to buy a small house, furnish it as a convent and import two nuns for CCD, a milestone in our community.

But my confrontation with Sister Romaine et al. was a first for me and the new restrictions at age 18 bred mutiny in my heart: no whistling, clapping hands or raucous laughter. White

gloves for trips into town and no pajamas under the academic robes required for 6:30 a.m. Mass on Holy Days in the college chapel.

I am given to understand that Catholic colleges bear absolutely no resemblance to those of yesteryear to which I must fervently say, "Thank God!"

And yet I took so many good things with me after that year of discontent that I hope somewhere in such institutions there abides a Sister Romaine.

The notion that a nun must wear the old traditional garb to be respected and set apart from the rest of us has always amused me.

Dressed in purple turban and mutton leg sleeves she would have been Sister Romaine, a force for good, a strict disciplinarian, a teacher extraordinaire, a holy woman.


Once on the way to morning Mass at a neighboring parish church (the college chapel proved uncomfortable for freshmen with hundreds of nuns seated behind us) I bumped into her, minus her head-covering at 5:30 a.m. in the lavatory. I was not the same for months.

At the end of each semester Sister Romaine would conduct a private interview with each English student. It was only partly academic.


At the end of my first semester she finished with me and as I was about to leave she said: "You may tell your parents that they have done a good job."


Taken by surprise I was not sure what she meant. Then it sunk in. My mouth softened a very little. Was that a smile I saw on hers? A half smile? No. No smile. I thanked her and left.

Love, I learned, can begin on the most meager encouragement.



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