

## FEATURE

## 'Smoke of Satan' exposes underground rebels

*The Smoke of Satan: Conservative and traditionalist dissent in contemporary American Catholicism*, by Michael W. Cuneo. Oxford University Press (New York and Oxford, 1997). 214 pp., \$27.50.

Reviewed by Father Robert Emmett Curran, SJ  
Catholic News Service

In the generation since the Second Vatican Council, a "conservative" reaction to the changes brought about by the council has occurred within the church in North America. A broad variety of Catholics believes that the council at least occasioned, if not caused, profound theological, philosophical, moral and liturgical transformations within the church that constituted spiritual cracks for a perversion of the church's soul and a way for "Satan's smoke" (the phrase is Pope Pius VI's) to have "made its way into the Temple of God."

"In small pockets scattered throughout

the country," Michael Cuneo reports in *The Smoke of Satan*, there exists "a sort of Catholic underground made up of people who are in rebellion" against the new order. Cuneo, a sociologist, offers a selective tour of this counter-Catholicism in North America, within which he identifies three distinct groups: "conservatives," "separatists," and "Marianists." Each has its specialized world view, its own spirituality, and its own remedy for preserving "authentic Catholicism" in the United States.

"Conservatives" — like Catholics United for the Faith, founded in 1968 in reaction to the protests that greeted *Humanae Vitae* in the American Catholic community — are deeply troubled by the sudden collapse of traditional Catholicism in America after the council and are committed to revitalizing the church, increasingly through the



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moral militancy involved in the witness against abortion.

This is largely a movement of laity, led by such people as James Hitchcock, a historian, or H. Lyman Stebbins, the stockbroker founder of Catholics United. For this group, *Humanae Vitae* has become a touchstone of countercultural piety, the dividing line between true Catholics and those only selectively committed. Hitchcock and his Fellowship of Catholic Scholars labor on as the outcast intellectuals of American Catholicism. *Fidelity* magazine and *The Wanderer* newspaper provide the major outlets for this worldview.

The activist wing of this branch is the militant Catholic pro-life movement.

More radical in their reaction to the post-conciliar church are the Catholic separatists or traditionalists who have sepa-

rated from Rome and the American hierarchy and maintain their own chapels, schools, seminaries and in some cases their own hierarchy. Largely founded to preserve the Tridentine liturgy discontinued in the wake of the council, the separatist centers, numbering some 300 by the 1980s, offer a pre-conciliar liturgical and sacramental culture for disaffected Catholics and religious seekers. A number of them hold that the popes since the council have been schismatic and the chair of Peter is currently vacant, thus legitimizing their own separation in order to be a saving remnant.

Constituting the premillennialist wing of this Catholic fundamentalism are the Marianists, such as the Apostles of Infinite Love, the Fatima Crusade, and the Bayside Movement of Veronica Lueken, which combine belief in Marian apparitions with apocalyptic expectations and frequently paranoia about communism and world government.

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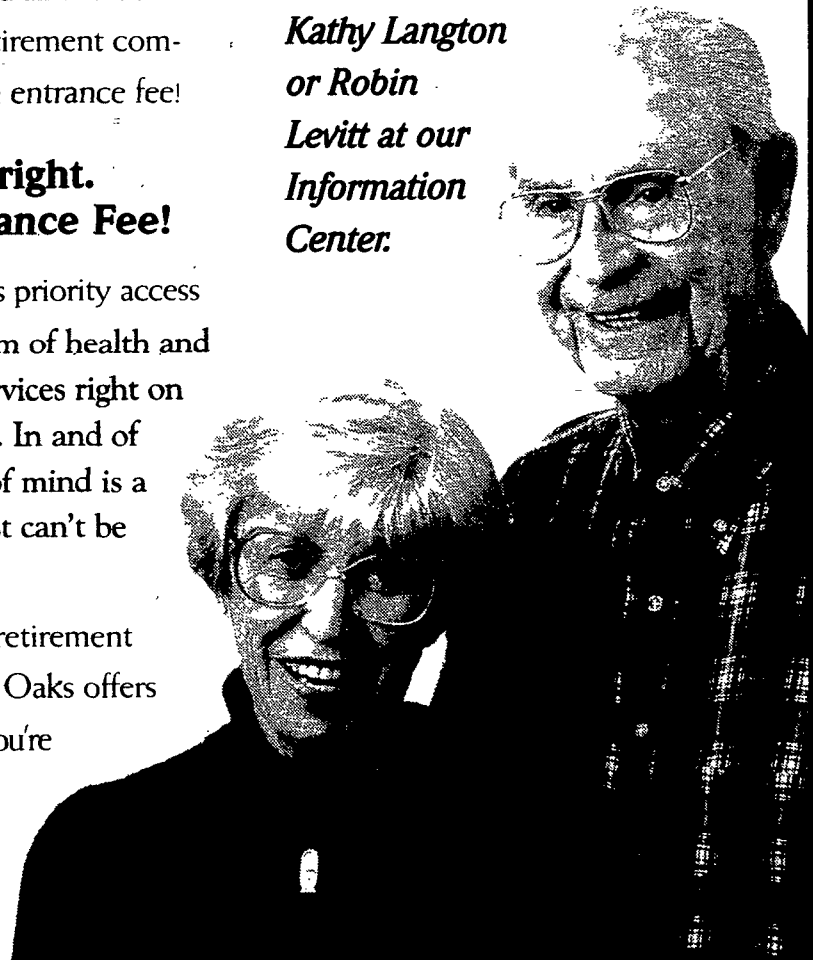
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