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THE FUNDAMENTALIST CHALLENGE

John Kenneth Weiskittel

Since the early 1960's, when the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., led thousands of followers in rallies, marches and acts of civil disobedience over the civil rights issue, Protestant ministers have emerged as important leaders in the American political arena. Jimmy Carter's successful 1976 campaign for the presidency, and Ronald Reagan's four years later, were due in no small measure to the support they garnered from Fundamentalist Christians. And in next year's race for the White House there is the possibility, however slight, that for the first time in our nation's history both major party candidates will be men of the cloth—Democrat Jesse Jackson and Republican Pat Robertson.

Fundamentalists—Protestants who adhere to a core of *fundamental* doctrines that they believe are essential to Christianity—have been the most influential and effective, and have been very active, in the so-called Religious Right. (Not all Fundamentalists are politically conservative, though most tend to be.) Even some liberals have attempted to exploit this growing movement in different ways: King deliberately affected the emotional preaching style of the old-fashioned black pastors (as has Jackson), and Carter cynically courted the Bible Belt Fundamentalists' vote while simultaneously seeking that of the hedonists with his notorious *Playboy* magazine interview.

In the past few years Fundamentalists have been at the forefront of the fight for traditional values. They have worked for the repeal of homicidal abortion laws despite consistent news media misrepresentations that the issue is strictly a *Catholic* one. Other laudable efforts have been in areas of anti-Communism, national defense, school prayer and opposition to Secular Humanism, to name a few. Earlier this year William Brevard Hand, judge of the U.S. District Court in Mobile, Alabama, ruled in favor of 600 parent-plaintiffs, by finding that over 40 state-approved textbooks promote the godless religion of Secular Humanism in violation of the establishment clause of the First Amendment of the Constitution and ordering them removed from classrooms.

Such political activism has infuriated left-wing groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Humanist Association and, of course, the mass media apparatus. And Norman Lear's People for the American Way (PAW) has launched a national campaign to "enlist mainline churches," writes Adon Taft in the *Miami Herald* (May 1, 1987), "in its battle with the religious right over textbooks and politics." He quotes Arthur Kropp, PAW's new president, as saying that those churches represent "a lot of potential for us" and "can be our greatest organizing tool."

What is Fundamentalism? When did it come into existence and why? How do its doctrines compare and contrast with traditional Catholicism? What approach should traditional Catholics take toward Fundamentalists? These are a few of the questions that need to be addressed in order for Catholics to stand up to the Fundamentalist challenge.

Fundamentalism is a growing movement. The nation's best-known and most effective Fundamentalist preacher is the Rev. Jerry Falwell, an independent Baptist minister who has made headlines since 1979 as the founder/president of the Moral Majority (renamed the Liberty Federation in 1986); as pastor of the 22,000-member Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia, where his sermons are broadcast for *The Old Time Gospel Hour* program to about 2 million homes over hundreds of TV stations; and, most recently, as the televangelist who came to the aid of *The PTL Show* after the scandal involving its host, the Pentecostal clergyman, the Rev. Jim Bakker. In addition, Falwell has started Liberty University and Divinity School (enrollment: 6,900) in Lynchburg and *The Fundamentalist Journal* (circulation: 70,000). Besides the Rev. Falwell and his Lynchburg complex, there are literally hundreds of lesser-known ministers, churches, schools, seminaries and publications with the same general doctrines.

By all accounts Fundamentalism is a relatively new religious phenomenon, starting at around the turn of the century as a distinctly American response to the Modernist tendencies then beginning to appear in Protestant denominations. While Pope Saint Pius X would exercise the full power of the Papacy to check Modernist encroachment into the Church, Protestants had no such safeguard. In rejecting any ecclesiastical authority centuries before and substituting in its place the error of "private interpretation," they were reduced to a war of words over who was correctly reading the Scriptures. For this reason Modernism infected Protestantism much sooner than it did Catholicism (along with the fact that Protestant Modernists seized control of strategically important seminaries, leaving Fundamentalists to seek out grass-roots support).

Fundamentalist Preachers From Rev. Billy Sunday To Rev. Jerry Falwell

"By the second decade of the twentieth century," writes Winthrop S. Hudson, a professor of Christian history at the Colgate-Rochester (Protestant) Divinity School, "Protestants had become embroiled in a bitter theological controversy. The protagonists were the 'Liberals' or 'Modernists,' who sought to adjust the inherited faith to the new intellectual climate, and the 'Fundamentalists,' who insisted that the old ways of stating the faith

must be preserved unimpaired." (*American Protestantism*, University of Chicago, 1966, p. 143) Disputes centered—as they do today—around how the Bible ought to be interpreted, if evolutionary theory is compatible with the Christian view of human origin and whether the teaching of Marx and other "reformers" could be used in shaping a "social gospel." About the only issue the two sides agreed upon was the need for Prohibition, but even there for differing reasons: the "liberals" saw it as a method of social change while Fundamentalists wanted to fight what they viewed as the evils of drink.

But it was not until the second decade of the twentieth century that Fundamentalism began to take the familiar form by which it is known today. William Whalen reports that "(t)wo wealthy Presbyterian laymen in Los Angeles published the tracts which outlined the 'fundamentals' of the Christian faith. More than 3,000,000 copies of *The Fundamentals*, the articles of war against Modernism, the social gospel and evolutionary theory, were distributed in 1910 and the years following." (*Separated Brethren*, Bruce, 1958, pp. 55-56)

The earliest Fundamentalist preacher to gain a national audience was the former major league baseball player, the Rev. Billy Sunday, a Presbyterian who "enlivened tent and tabernacle with his colorful denunciations of Modernists, saloon keepers, birth controllers, and Socialists." (ibid, p. 56) *Colorful* is something of an understatement, as his pulpit style, by all accounts, makes the sermons of today's revivalists sound as though they are being given by insurance agents. In an authorized biography written at the height of his career, the Rev. Sunday was called "a physical sermon" and the following examples were given to illustrate:

> Some of the platform activities of Sunday make spectators gasp. He races to and fro across the platform. Like a jackknife he fairly doubles up in emphasis. One hand smites the other. His foot stomps the floor as if to destroy it. Once I saw him bring his clenched fist down so hard on the seat of a chair that I feared the blood would flow and bones would be broken. No posture is too extreme for this reckless gymnast. Yet it all seems natural... * * *
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> ...When in the sermon he alludes to the man who acts no better than a four-footed brute, Sunday is for an instant down on all fours on the platform and you see that brute. As he pictures a man praying he sinks to his knees for a single moment. When he talks of the deathbed penitent as a man waiting to be pumped full of embalming fluid, he cannot help going through the motions of pumping in the fluid. He remarks that deathbed repentance is "burning the candle of life in the service of the devil, and then blowing the smoke in God's face"—and the last phrase is accompanied by "pfouff!"... (William T. Ellis, *"Billy" Sunday: The Man & His Message*, L.T. Myers, 1914, pp. 138-39)

Those moved to "conversion" by this "acrobatic preaching," as Myers called it, would then come forward down the sawdust-strewn center aisle. This public profession, "hitting the sawdust trail" in the words of the Rev. Sunday, has continued to be a feature of modern revivals as the "altar call." (The Rev. Jimmy Swaggart, a Pentecostal whose fiery sermons sound more Fundamentalist in tone, describes his ministry as the "old sawdust trail, sort of upgraded.")

In just a few decades Fundamentalism had become a force with which to be reckoned but its first rise was short-lived. Billy Sunday had, in 1914, been so highly regarded that he spoke on invitation at the University of Pennsylvania but his inflammatory rhetoric eventually proved to be an embarrassment for Protestants. Further, setbacks were experienced in the political activities of the movement. First, in 1925 it lost the celebrated Scopes Trial, the bone of contention of which was evolution (no pun intended), as lawyer Clarence Darrow, a self-styled agnostic, bested his Fundamentalist counterpart and former presidential candidate, William Jennings Bryan, over whether the theory could be taught in government schools. Next, Prohibition was repealed in 1933, 14 years after its ratification had unwittingly led to speakeasys, bathtub "hooch" and mobsterism. And at the same time, the manufactured Great Depression and the ensuing New Deal gave Social Gospel proponents the opportunity to castigate the Fundamentalists for supporting the free market and private charity instead of government interventionism.

By the mid-1930's Fundamentalism was scurrying in retreat and engaged in internal conflicts. Professor J. Gresham Machem of Princeton, described by Whalen as "one of the ablest advocates of Fundamentalism and one of its few real scholars," and a small group of followers formed what came to be known as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. (op. cit., p. 56) In true Protestant form, members of this new sect were soon bickering among themselves and "(s)hortly thereafter some of the Machem schismatics disagreed with him on total abstinence and millennialism (that is, belief that Christ will soon return to earth and reign triumphantly for 1,000 years—JKW) and set up their own Bible Presbyterian Church." (ibid) In 1938 the Rev. Carl McIntyre, a student of Machem, started the dissident Bible Presbyterian Church. He "bitterly opposed the Federal (now National—JKW) Council of Churches," which he accused of being "infected with Modernism and Communism," and in 1941 founded the American Council of Christian Churches. (ibid, pp. 56, 239) Others who held the line in the 1940's were: the Rev. Charles E. Fuller and his radio show, *The Old-Fashioned Revival Hour;* John R. Rice, D.D., whose weekly *Sword of the Lord* magazine produced pamphlets with titles such as "All Satan's Apples Have Worms," "Church Members Who Make God Sick," and "Eight Gospel Absurdities if a Born-Again Soul Ever Loses Salvation"; and the Rev. Billy James Hargis, founder in 1948 of the Christian Crusade, which he ran until 1981 when a sex scandal severely damaged his reputation.

Today, prominent Fundamentalists, besides the Revs. Falwell, McIntyre and Hargis, include: the Rev. John Ankerburg, a Chattanooga-based televangelist whose program is styled somewhat after Phil Donahue's and features debates between Fundamentalists and "cult" group members (a Conciliar "Catholic" was featured on the segment devoted to "exposing" the Roman Catholic Church); Charles F. Stanley, executive secretary of the Southern Baptist Convention; the Rev. James Robison, another TV minister who has gained national attention in his

work with the Religious Roundtable, a conservative group that candidate Ronald Reagan used to his advantage in the 1980 presidential race; Ben Hayden, host of a "nondenominational" telecast shown in the U.S. and Canada; the Rev. Tim LaHaye, author and cofounder of the Moral Majority who, in his book *Battle for the Mind,* blames Saint Thomas Aquinas for helping set the stage for Humanism; Dr. David Noebel, a former associate of the Rev. Hargis who left Hargis because of the scandal and who has written numerous books, particularly concerning the harmful effects of rock music on America's youth; and the Rev. Bob Jones, Jr., chancellor of Bob Jones University, who has made repeated slurs against the Roman Catholic Church which he has characterized as "the old Harlot Church." (Northern Ireland's anti-Catholic Presbyterian leader, the Rev. Ian Paisley, a frequent guest of McIntyre in the U.S., participated with Jones at the 1983 World Congress of Fundamentalists, where a resolution labeled the Catholic Church as "mother of harlots.")

The Fundamentals of Fundamentalism

Any Catholic entering into a religious conversation with a Fundamentalist has been asked certain questions such as: Have you been saved? Are you a "born again" Christian? Do you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior? Are you ready for the Rapture?

What strikes the Catholic immediately about such questions is how they can sound both theologically *correct* and yet somehow *wrong* at the same time. Terms such as "saved," "born again," "Lord and Savior" are concepts that the average Catholic knows from sermons, CCD classes, devotional literature and, of course, from Scripture itself. Why is it, then, that, when they are spoken by a Fundamentalist, the Catholic feels he is hearing a new language and being put on the defensive?

The answer, quite simply, is that he *is* hearing a new language and he *is* being put on the defensive. When a Fundamentalist makes such queries, it is from a theological perspective that may, in places, be close to Catholic teaching but just as often represents a position far removed from Catholic orthodoxy. And underlying such seemingly innocuous questions is a probing to determine whether the Catholic passes the test put forth according to the Fundamentalist interpretation of the Bible.

The questions of the Fundamentalist must always be viewed as coming from one who rejects the authority of the Church and who counters this authority with the false "right" of each Christian to arrive at the correct reading of the Bible through the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. But this they have no more competence or authority to do than have their foes, the Modernists; no more than have the Pentecostals, Social Gospelers, Quakers, Amish, Mormons, Anglicans or any of the other man-made "Christian" denominations. All are condemned by the very Scriptures they claim to uphold (see II Peter 1:20 and 3:15-18). They have, then, no way to demonstrate the correctness of their teachings, while Catholics well-versed in their Faith can easily show how the Roman Catholic Church has for nearly 2,000 years transmitted, intact and undefiled, the creed professed by the Apostles.

This basic difference of Scriptural readings is central to all other doctrinal deviations and needs to be kept in mind at all times when the Catholic is confronted with Fundamentalist questioning. When the Fundamentalist asks if the Catholic has been "saved," he is referring to a supposed moment in time when a believer, by avowing his faith in Christ, is once-and-for-all-time redeemed, regardless of what sort of life he lives after conversion. The Catholic must counter that salvation is dependent upon a soul's *cooperation with divine grace* and is, therefore, conditional and—while ardently hoped for—uncertain. Again, on the point about whether one is "a born again Christian," false theology distorts a basic religious truth. This is a redundant phrase. In the Sacrament of Baptism one becomes at once both born again *and* Christian, the two terms being inseparable in the Catholic sense. A "non-born again Christian" or, say, a "born again Shintoist" are absurdities. (Fundamentalists seem keen on redundancies, sometimes referring to salvation as a "free gift from God," as though there could be *any other* kind of gift; and "Bible-believing Christians," which subtly suggests that Tradition is unnecessary for faith.) But to the Fundamentalists, one is not "born again" until he experiences an emotional certitude about being saved, which is termed "receiving the Spirit." Here is another place where they fall into two camps, as some would argue rightly that this smacks of Pentecostalism. Those Conciliar "Catholics" (often with a Charismatic preference) who thus describe themselves have strayed far from the Church's thinking, since faith is not an emotional "high" but an assent to the full teaching of the Church. While the emotions, if kept in check by reason, may play a positive role in one's religious life, they are never to be regarded as the sole or primary gauge of right belief or conduct—and extreme emotionalism has always been condemned.

As for whether Catholics hold Christ as "personal Lord and Savior," the answer can be at once "yes" and "no." If what is meant is that His Passion has redeemed every believer as an individual and that He hears the prayers of the soul of each and every believer, then the answer can be in the affirmative. But if what is meant, and this is the Fundamentalist sense, is that Christ mediates for man without or outside of His Mystical Body (that is, without a visible Roman Catholic Church), then the answer is a resounding "NO!", for such a version of an extremely individualistic and invisible Church flies in the face of all Church history and Our Lord's clear intentions.

Finally, on the question of the "Rapture," Catholics should be warned that this concept—developed by the nineteenth-century founder of the Plymouth Brethren, John Darby, and suggesting that Christians will be physically lifted from their jobs, cars, homes, schools, etc., into the air at Christ's Second Coming—is an example of Fundamentalist preoccupation with the End of the World. (Another is the support that ministers such as the Rev. Falwell give to the State of Israel, which they believe to be a fulfillment of "end-time" prophecy.) Although the Church has never ruled on the matter, and although the set of events surrounding the Second Coming is open to varying opinions, the drift of the Fundamentalist position is toward *useless speculation.* Whether Our Lord returns today or 2,000 years from now should be of little consequence to the daily life of Christians for

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Saint Maria Goretti

Jill Wiesner

On July 5, 1902, eleven-and-a-half-year-old Maria Goretti gave her life in defense of the virtue of purity. As Pope Piux XII proclaimed at her beatification, Maria "desired but one thing: fidelity to Christ at any price, even at the cost of her life." With the "strength of soul" which characterizes virgins and martyrs, Maria Goretti set an example of heroism for the youth of today.

Born on October 16, 1890, in the mountain village of Corinaldo, Italy, the second of seven children of Luigi and Assunta Goretti, Maria was a beautiful little girl with bright chestnut hair and a radiant smile. Though she had a quick temper at times, she was always a cheerful and obedient child. She was particularly devoted to her father, and was the one person who could be counted on to bring a smile to his lips when he came in weary from his work in the fields.

When Maria was six her family moved from the rocky slopes of the Appennines to the fertile valley south of Rome, where her father became a sharecropper for Count Mazzoleni. In an attempt to keep expenses down, Luigi Goretti decided against hiring men to help him with the work, and cleared and drained the marshy land and planted the crop alone. He soon had an excellent crop of wheat but, having contracted malaria and though he continued to work in spite of it, he finally collapsed and was unable to complete the harvest.

As the harvest could not wait for Luigi's recovery, Count Mazzoleni sent two hired men to finish cutting the wheat. Giovanni Serenelli and his teenaged son Alessandro were taken into the Goretti household, as the Gorettis could not afford to pay for their board in town. Both men seemed to be hard workers and, for a time, the arrangement worked well.

Once the harvest was in, however, the Serenellis changed. Giovanni began to drink and quarrel and to pilfer grain from the common store. Alessandro, who had been kind to the children during the harvest, became sullen and unfriendly. When the family made their Sunday journey to Nettuno for Mass, Alessandro stayed at home. Maria's mother noticed that he regularly purchased salacious magazines at a newsstand and locked himself in his room with them for hours. She warned her eldest son, Angelo, to stay away from him.

Luigi Goretti's health deteriorated under the combined strain of the discord in his household and the malaria which sapped his strength. Though he trudged out to the fields early each morning, he returned home in the evenings, pale and silent, and sat woodenly before his plate, barely touching his food.

Eventually, he was too weak to get out of bed. Maria often ran to Nettuno for quinine but it no longer helped. The children said their nightly prayer around their father's bed, their eyes filled with sadness. When the priest came to administer Extreme Unction, Luigi received the Sacrament with relief, but the sight of the Serenellis in the doorway of his room filled him with anxiety for his family. "Assunta," he murmured to his wife over and over again, "go back to Corinaldo."

After his death his widow tried to fulfill his request, but she and her children were forced to remain at Ferriere until they earned enough money to pay their way back to Corinaldo. Giovanni Serenelli was put in charge of the farm and was a stern and harsh master. Mrs. Goretti offered to work in the fields in her husband's place but Giovanni refused to accept her until Maria was old enough to handle the housework alone.

In spite of the family's hardship Maria went about her chores with a happy heart. She was now eleven years old and eagerly preparing to receive Our Lord in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. As she was unable to read, she had arranged to take catechism lessons during the week from a woman in the village so that she would be prepared on Sundays when the priest came to instruct the first communicants. Her mother was concerned about Maria taking such a big step with so little education, but the priest at Nettuno was amazed at the depth of the child's understanding. "Your daughter is very well-prepared," he told Mrs. Goretti. "Place her under the Virgin's protecting mantle and have no fear."

As Maria received instruction for her First Holy Communion, her interest in worldly things faded. Toys and pretty clothes no longer attracted her. In her obedience to her mother and in her kindnesses to her brothers and sisters, she was exemplary, ever trying to please Jesus in all things.

One sunny afternoon, she was radiant with joy as she came running home to her mother. She was to make her First Communion on the Feast of Corpus Christi. Friends and neighbors all shared in her happiness—providing her veil, her shoes and a crown of flowers. As was the custom, Maria knelt before her family the night before her First Communion and asked forgiveness for her faults.

On the morning of Corpus Christi Maria sat with glowing countenance among the 14 other first communicants, listening eagerly as the priest reminded them to preserve always the innocence of their souls. Long after the other children had left the church, Maria remained on her knees in thanksgiving and adoration. Afterwards, she told her mother that she would prefer to suffer "a thousand deaths rather than commit one sin."

Maria's ardor never faded. As she took her mother's place in the house so her mother could work in the fields, she never complained or shirked her responsibilities. She was quiet and reserved, gentle and kind. In her household duties she saw endless opportunities to do the will of God, and she always made time each day to teach her little brothers and sisters the prayers she had learned from her mother.

Only once did she run to her mother in distress. At the public well in Ferriere she had heard a girl from her First Communion

class telling an offensive joke to a boy. Maria was horrified. "How could she so soon forget Jesus?" she asked her mother.

As Maria progressed in virtue another member of the household had been on quite a different path. As Alessandro Serenelli, who had fallen into evil habits, looked at Maria lustful thoughts filled his mind. Twice he had made advances towards her, advances which she rejected with horror. The second time, he threatened to kill her if she told her mother. Terrified by his threat and frightened lest she be the cause of more trouble between the two families, Maria remained silent. She shrank from Alessandro, not even eating at the dinner table with the family when he was present, but disappearing with the excuse of an errand or task. Her mother noticed that she seemed more quiet and pensive than ususal, but was so weary herself that she did not question her daughter.

Maria—who had never been afraid, who had laughed at her father's bloodcurdling ghost stories, who had run ahead of the family on the road to church on Sundays to chase away the snakes with a stick—was for the first time in her life filled with apprehension. She turned to Our Lord and His Blessed Mother for strength.

On the hot, muggy afternoon of Saturday, July 5, Maria was in the house doing some mending while her mother and the other children were thrashing beans near the barn. Seeming to appear out of nowhere, Alessandro loomed before her in the kitchen, then slammed and locked the door, preventing escape. Brandishing a knife he demanded her surrender. The alternative, he told her, was death. Her eyes wide with horror, she told him, "God does not want it. It is a sin. You will go to hell." Enraged, he repeated the ultimatum. With the dagger poised above her Maria looked directly at her attacker and said clearly, "I will not." Although the knife struck her no less than fourteen times, Maria Goretti did not utter a cry.

Several hours later her mother found her lying on the kitchen floor and, with the help of a neighbor, bound her wounds. She was rushed to the hospital and, as the jolting of the horse-drawn ambulance caused her to gasp with pain several times, she admitted to her mother that she was suffering "a little."

After two hours of surgery without anesthetic and a pain-wracked night, Maria awoke to see her mother and the hospital chaplain beside her bed. Her eyes glowed with joy when he told her he had come to bring her Holy Viaticum. When he asked if she would forgive her murderer, she answered without hesitation, "I forgive him...May God forgive him...I want him with God in paradise like the repentant thief." A short time later she smiled up at her mother and said, with great peace, "It is Jesus I am soon going to see."

Eight years later Alessandro Serenelli, the initially unrepentant murderer, broke down in his prison cell and wept, asking forgiveness for his sins. He attributed his conversion to Maria's intercession. He became a principal witness for her beatification, testifying: "I have sinned deeply, but I feel confident of salvation. I have a saint in Heaven praying for me."

On June 25, 1950, with her mother present at the ceremony, Pope Pius XII enrolled Maria's name on the calendar of saints. In his sermon on that occasion the pope urged the youth of the world to emulate her "strength of faith and...inviolate purity of conduct" and to remember that, through the intercession of this "beautiful and loveable saint...the children and all the young people will find a safe refuge, trusting that they shall be protected from every contamination, and shall be able to walk the highways of life with that serenity of spirit and deep joy which is the heritage of those who are pure of heart."

The heroism of Saint Maria Goretti was compared by Pope Pius XII to that of Saint Agnes and Saint Joan of Arc. Her courage should surely be an inspiration for the youth of today, who are besieged on all sides by immorality and ugliness of every imaginable kind. May her example strengthen them and her intercession protect them! †

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all are called upon to live every instant of their lives as though He were *already here.*

Meeting The Fundamentalist Challenge

There is no argument but that the Catholic can find many areas of agreement with the Fundamentalist: a belief in absolutes, the pro-life struggle, the need for a strong moral foundation for our nation, opposition to Communism, etc. What's more, we see in many of them a sincere desire to order their lives around Christ and to reject the shifting ethical and doctrinal positions being taken by many in the so-called "mainline" denominations. In short, many would be Catholics if only they were presented the truths of our Faith in a solid and convincing manner. A smaller group, rigid in their hatred of the Church and unwilling to consider these truths rationally, can be reached only by prayer.

How, then, should a Catholic defend the Faith in his encounters with Fundamentalists? He must avoid getting bogged down in a match of Scripture quotes. While they may be helpful if used with an appeal to the *authority of the Church*, to rely on them alone reduces any discussion to the level of two private opinions. By all means, it must be made clear that only *one* side—the Fundamentalist's—is coming from his own *personal* views. The Catholic, citing the infallible dogma of the Church, is on the firm ground of authority. For him the question isn't whether one accepts a list of test-doctrines, but that he accepts the full *Deposit of Faith* as preserved by the Church down through the ages and for all times. And, in all discussions with Fundamentalists, let us Catholics beware of indulging in belligerence and hostility for these are contrary to the true Christian spirit. If winning an argument involves the violation of such virtues as patience and charity, then the victory is a hollow one. To defend the Church and its teachings is a most noble endeavor, to be sure, but hardly justified if God is offended in the process. †

Pray
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RAISING CHRIST'S BANNER: THE 1987 VEXILLA REGIS CONVENTION

John Kenneth Weiskittel

"Christ Our Lord must be reinstated as the ruler of human society. It belongs to Him, as do all its members." These words, written in 1900 by Pope Leo XIII in his encyclical, *Tametsi* (On Jesus Christ, Our Redeemer), well express the underlying theme of the third annual Vexilla Regis Association convention.

A commitment to such sentiments motivated about 75 men to turn out for the three-day meeting, held in the Detroit, Michigan area over the Memorial Day weekend. Participants came from at least ten states (some came from as far away as Florida and California), as well as from Canada. Some 60 men were formally received into the Association in ceremonies that followed a High Mass on the final day of the convention.

The Vexilla Regis Association—Catholic Men for Christ the King was organized several years ago by Father William Jenkins with an objective based on Pope Saint Pius X's motto: "To restore all things in Christ." The group's name comes from the ancient Good Friday hymn that accompanies the procession of the Blessed Sacrament and means "the royal banners" or "banners of the King" (the first stanza begins, "The royal banners forward go/The Cross shines forth in mystic glow...). The selection of the name is doubly significant to traditional Catholics, for not only does it call on the Church Militant to bravely advance as standard bearers of Our Lord in the battle "against the spirits of wickedness in the high places" (Ephesians 6:12), but it recalls the fact that the *Vexilla Regis* hymn was deleted from the Holy Week liturgy as part of the pre-Conciliar "reforms" that paved the way for the Novus Ordo "Mass."

The Association has its roots in the Catholic Action movement promulgated and promoted by several popes, especially Popes Leo XIII and Saint Pius X, the function of which is to apply Catholic principles to the social, political and economic issues of the day. In harmony with the papal teachings, any genuine restoration of Christ's Kingship in society is seen as possible only if preceded by a striving for personal sanctification. So, in the words of Vexilla Regis' Chaplain General, Father Donald J. Sanborn, "The spiritual formation of the members is the primary goal of the Association." To help achieve this, each member pledges to follow a number of Observances, including the reading and viewing of assigned materials, daily prayers (the rosary, mental prayer and examination of conscience), daily Mass and Holy Communion (wherever and whenever possible), the shunning of network and cable TV, avoidance of bars and immoral films, and participation in the activities of the local Vexillum (chapter).

This year's convention was highlighted by several conferences. Father Clarence Kelly spoke on "Catholic Response to the Fundamentalists," showing how Protestantism's three false rules of faith (that is, salvation by faith alone, private interpretation of the Bible and private inspiration) contrast with Catholicism's proper Rule of Faith (that is, that the faithful, in order to "know, love and serve God" as He desires, must believe and live in conformity with Sacred Scripture and Tradition as authoritatively taught by the Church's *magisterium*). The Catholic Rule of Faith can be shown to be true, said Father Kelly, because it conforms to three necessary maxims: (1) It was left by Christ so we could identify truth from error; (2) If faithfully followed it will unerringly lead to truth; and (3) It equally applies to all people, no matter their condition in life. Against this, Fundamentalists come from a religious background that through the centuries has variously practiced suicide (the Albigensians), taught the predestination of the damned (John Calvin) and blasphemously called Our Lord an adulterer (Martin Luther—here Father quoted directly from a book of Luther's writings), and is made up of sects that variously appeal to different classes or nationalities of people.

"Onward, Christian Soldiers" was the theme of Father Fenton's talk, a talk in which he touched on points familiar to readers of *The Athanasian*. If the Church Militant (now constituted in traditional Catholicism) is to be true to its calling, if it is successfully to fight Christ's battles against the "isms" arrayed in opposition to the Church's doctrines and moral precepts, if it truly wishes to see the Prince of Peace "reinstated as the ruler of human society," then its members must, Father said, become more active in their pursuit of these worthy aims. Too many Catholics have all but conceded the enemy's victory and have become content to pray, attend Mass and receive the Sacraments. He then expressed his hope that the members of Vexilla Regis would not shrink from the formidable challenge they face in fighting for the propagation of the Faith and for the advance of Catholic social principles, while striving to sanctify themselves and their families. As always, the message was delivered forcefully and with no mincing of words—one member aptly described it as "vintage Father Fenton."

The importance of self-discipline in a world gone mad was the substance of "It's Never Easy," the speech given by Vexilla Regis' Instructor General, Patrick Mullen. Surrounded by a society, declared Mr. Mullen, in which such evils as abortion, homosexuality, divorce and the American government's hypocritical double standard (such as placing sanctions on pro-American South Africa while conducting business as usual with the butchers who run the Soviet Union) are widely accepted as "routine" patterns of behavior, traditional Catholics must stand as an island of sanity. And for Association members in particular, he concluded, because they are involved in *active* combat against "workaday" wickedness, they must be girded with a firm inner resolve that can only come from a close union with Christ.

Following this, Dr. Rama Coomaraswamy presented a talk on "Democracy, Capitalism, and Adam Smith: A Proper Perspective." In his usual professorial style, he expounded in detail on so many subjects that it is impossible to do justice to them all in a brief summary. Certainly one of the most important areas covered was the role of high finance in the anti-Christian conspiracy. This new "monied aristocracy," stated Dr. Coomaraswamy, can be seen operating in the Council on Foreign Relations, Tri-

lateral Commission, World Bank, International Monetary Fund and other groups; and in that "aristocracy" can be found the link between "capitalism" and "Communism" and the driving force behind the push for a One World Government.

Rounding out the conferences was "Catholic Action and the Interior Life," given by Julius Smetona, Moderator General of Vexilla Regis. Using Dom Jean-Baptiste Chautard's definition of the interior life in *The Soul of the Apostolate* as his point of reference ("Supernatural life is the life of Jesus Christ Himself *in my soul*, by Faith, Hope, and Charity..."), Mr. Smetona showed, through illustrations taken from the lives of the saints, how *fruitful* Catholic Action is enlivened by and inseparable from a life of grace. In contrast, he said, the man living in habitual mortal sin will be unable (or unwilling) to appreciate, for example, the difference between aborting an unborn child and killing a baby seal.

Cautious optimism would be the best way to describe the impressions drawn from the convention by Association leaders. Mr. Mullen said that, while the 1986 convention more or less dealt with hashing out broad objectives, this year's moved towards establishing *definite* goals and structure. Mr. Smetona stressed that there were more men in the ranks of the *committed* and fewer "curiosity seekers" than a year ago. Both were quite pleased with the *enthusiasm* they saw, but agreed that members must *maintain* this level of enthusiasm if gains are to be realized.

Those interested in joining Vexilla Regis, receiving more information or obtaining videotapes of the conferences can contact:

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(The following is a segment of a talk delivered several weeks ago at the convention of the Vexilla Regis Association—Catholic Men for Christ the King.)

...Three marks or qualities or traits ought to distinguish truly traditional Roman Catholics in general and, in particular, you men of the Vexilla Regis Association—and they are prayer, knowledge and action.

First and foremost you must be men of prayer. By this I refer primarily, of course, to the Mass, the Sacraments, the rosary, penitential practices, approved devotions of the Church, etc. All these—with the Mass and Sacraments having priority—should be part and parcel of the spiritual agenda of authentic men of prayer to the extent that the various duties of their state in life permit them. Further, a spirit of prayer should be developed that will in due time permeate and saturate your life so as to transform it into a truly God-centered, Christlike life in every respect.

Such, admittedly, is a big order and calls for strong convictions and determination and persistence. Our apostolate demands men of strong faith and charity and honor and purity and prudence and fortitude and humility—in a word, men of virtue—and without a solid and ardent prayer life, we will not have such men.

Putting first things first, then, I urge you to give prayer, and all that that includes, top priority in your lives. "Whatever you do in word or in work, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus..." (Col. 3, 17) However sincere our motives and however lofty our goals, a sound prayer life must be the foundation of all our activity. In the words of Holy Scripture, "unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." (Ps. 126, 1)

Second in the list of the three essential requirements which you must have is knowledge, primarily knowledge of the Faith. To know our religion is an obligation incumbent upon all of us because (1) it is God-given; (2) we cannot intelligently live a way of life or be dedicated to a cause which we do not adequately comprehend; and (3) we cannot correct the false notions others may have about the Faith or effectively refute attacks upon it or propagate its doctrines if we ourselves are not well informed on the subject. For such reasons, then, it is the duty of every traditional Roman Catholic to know his religion, a duty particularly urgent today because of the widespread confusion regarding Catholic doctrinal and moral teachings, a confusion occasioned, at least in large part, by the false teachers of the Conciliar Church.

"What doth it profit a man if he gain the world and suffer the loss of his soul"? What too doth it profit a Catholic if he be an expert on trivia, if he knows much about "umpteen" things which don't amount to a hill of beans and yet is an illiterate on matters pertaining to the Faith and the intelligent living of that Faith? What kind of a scale of values is that? What sense does it make? I'm not saying that all knowledge of secular or worldly matters is wrong. By no means. But I am saying that, when knowledge of and concern for such things so occupy and consume a person's thinking and living as to obscure or debase

the very purpose of life, then that person ought to start getting his priorities straight.

To the catechism question, "Why did God make us?", the answer given is crystal clear: "God made us to know Him, to love Him and to serve Him in this life and thereby to be happy with Him forever in Heaven. And in that one simple catechism statement we have the foundation of the one and only sane and sound philosophy of life which means anything in the final analysis. But to know God as He wills to be known—and thereby truly to love and serve Him—we must know the faith which he has revealed and which is taught in all its truth and beauty and fullness and purity in and by the Roman Catholic Church alone. Hence, again, the grave obligation we have of knowing our Faith that we may know God, compared to which all other knowledge is vain and hollow and futile. "Vanity of vanities and all is vanity" save in knowing and loving and serving God.

And then there is action, the third item which, I contend, is also an essential requirement for any person who would be a Roman Catholic in the full sense of that term. It was back in the early 70's that the traditional Catholic movement started to take any recognizable form. From its very beginning I had, I guess, taken for granted that those who were or would become a part of that movement would be, well, more or less the cream of Catholicism. After all, I figured, these were the people who, by the grace of God, saw the Conciliar Church for what it was and had the courage of their convictions to refuse to have any part of it. Their beloved Church had been gradually and massively infiltrated by its enemies (Freemasons, Communists, Modernists, Secular Humanists), infiltrated to the extent that, as a result, another Church actually came into being at some point which, while retaining the name and many of the trappings of the Roman Catholic Church, had ceased to be the real thing. They well knew, of course, on the word of Christ Himself, that the Church He founded would remain forever but they well knew also that this new Conciliar Church was something else again. And so it became their awesome responsibility, under the guidance of the pitiably few truly traditional Catholic clergy who shared their convictions, to preserve and to defend and to promote the Faith until, God willing and in His own good time, the Church would be restored to its former self.

Over 15 years have now passed since the traditional Catholic movement made its appearance on the American scene—and they have been hectic years indeed. As would be expected, the vast generality of Catholics who were and are associated with traditional Catholicism have been and are, from my observation, devout, morally good, industrious, family-oriented men and women, deeply concerned about the salvation of their own souls and those of their family and close friends. So far, so good—but that's about it. The great majority of these same people have been and are, in varying degrees, miserable failures when it comes to Catholic action. They are infected with what I would call parochialism or provincialism in matters pertaining to the Church, by which I mean that they do not see beyond their particular chapel and traditional group. They have a tunnel vision with regard to the Faith, with seemingly little or no concern for it outside their own environment. They likely pray for the Church and for its priests and for their fellow Catholics but, as far as being active, militant, zealous, apostolic on behalf of the Faith—this, assuredly, they are not. And because most traditional Catholics are so sadly lacking in these essential qualities, they fall far short of what they are supposed to be as Roman Catholics and of what the Church expects them to be. Every Roman Catholic worthy of the name has a moral obligation not only to know his religion and to live it in his personal life but also publicly to promote and to defend and to fight for his Faith. This has always been the case and it is especially so in our day. That the vast majority of traditional Roman Catholics have so woefully failed in the fulfillment of their duty in this matter of apostolic action has been a tremendous disappointment to me over the years—and it continues to be such...

...Surely never before throughout the Christian centuries have the powers of evil, the forces of hell, prevailed more extensively than they do today. The grossest immorality of every conceivable kind pervades our nation and the world to an extent that I, for one, could hardly have imagined, say, some 25 years back. It follows, then, that there never was a time when there was a more crying need, a more desperate urgency for truly effective Christian counteraction than there is today. If God and His revealed truth and His moral law are to become the dominant force and influence in the minds and hearts and souls of men and among the leaders and in the councils of nations, if Christian culture and Christian civilization are ever to be restored—all this can only come about through one organization, the Roman Catholic Church. There is no other solution; there is no other answer...

Fr. F. Fenton

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