

The Fathers of The Oratory

P. O. Box 1326

Lexington, Kentucky 40501

A LETTER TO OUR FRIENDS

Copyright 1967 by the Board of Trustees of the Fathers of the Oratory of Kentucky, Inc. No part of this essay may be reprinted without the express permission of the copyright proprietors.

We have lately been the target of an anonymous letter published in a paper we wanted to trust. We had, it is true, been finding this difficult. We knew that *The Wanderer* had refused to print a full page advertisement for the Catholic Traditionalist Movement, an organization we esteem for its service to orthodoxy, and had declined also the ads of a foremost conservative personality; and had run material to which, in our view at least, an authentic conservative could not lend complete assent.

Further, *The Wanderer* had printed two of our essays without asking or receiving our permission to do this. There is a difference between my driving your car with your knowledge and permission, and driving it without your knowledge and permission.

Had they asked, we would have given the proprietors of *The Wanderer* our permission to print "The New Arians." They would have had to promise us that it would be exactly reproduced. They had no license from us to print our material, let alone bowdlerize it, but they did anyhow. A single sentence was omitted in *The Wanderer's* unauthorized version of "The New Arians," a sentence whose omission we regard as an act of timidity.

Anyhow, we feel as did Abraham Lincoln that if we had to take time out to rebut all the accusations made against us, "we should have to close this office to all other business." We will not be diverted from our efforts to save the Church from the New Arians within her by nameless critics. In any case, our friends will require no rebuttal, our enemies will accept none, and the favour of Reeds Shaken By The Wind is not worth bothering about.

†

The Oratory over which I preside, tiny as it is, has served industriously in Kentucky for four and a half years. We came here at the invitation of the bishop of the diocese. In fact, he gave us the chalice we use at daily Mass, and a set of our vestments. All this time we have served his diocese by preaching and supply work, and even by being the bishop's ghost writer.

The trouble is that we take our Catholicism seriously. Almost a year ago we decided that our Catholicism had no very secure future in this part of the world, and we notified the diocese of our intending withdrawal.

All our plans were revised in the face of a series of personal tragedies with which we feel our Lord has sought to purify our consecration to Him.

It will surely suffice to show the extent to which our unrelenting defence of Catholic faith and practise (on television and in *Christendom*) had brought us to sudden disfavour, to relate this incredible fact: When my dearest Mother's tragic death was announced in the Lexington press last August, of those parish priests in this area in whose pulpits I had preached, whose confessor or counsellor I had been, only one communicated to me any message of condolence. From all over America came letters of sympathy, but from my brother priests, with the single honourable exception, came no word; although, later, two, chided by me, sent a note.

At last, we received word that we were to leave the diocese. Recall that we had already determined to do this and had so notified the Chancery. I wrote a final letter to the bishop. In that letter appeared these exact words:

"With some contemporary bishops there is neither obedience nor canon law any more; or these are invoked only to inhibit conservative and orthodox priests.

"I respectfully recommend you to read one or other of the standard lives of our holy Father Saint Philip Neri . . . to see how he would never betray our Lord Jesus Christ, even at the cost of being suspended a divinis—which he was.

"I hope you understand that in a day when the central mysteries of our holy Faith are being denied or explained away with impunity in many dioceses, we stand quite ready to die at once rather than to disavow the Catholic Faith in any particular. We will not disobey that Gospel which the Apostles bid us hold 'though it were an angel from Heaven' that should preach us any other.

"Perhaps it will not be thought merely melodramatic to say that we hope you are not going to play Pierre Cauchon of Beauvais to our Jeanne d'Arc?"

We are still making our arrangements for removal to what we believe to be an orthodox jurisdiction. We are not either suspended or under canonical sentence of any sort.

†

What about the future? This much is crystal clear: A priest who takes his ordination promises and oath against Modernism seriously cannot keep silence while the bishops violate their obligations to protect and defend the Faith.

We cannot be silent. We will not be silent. Silence would buy us security, but it would bury us in hell.

We agree with St. Jerome, writing to Pope Boniface, that, "men who patronize heretics and mix with them should not be allowed to retain the title of bishops."

If we were living in the Fourth Century under Arian bishops could we obey them? Can we obey modern day bishops who our consciences tell us are apostates? Can we allow a false notion of obedience to deceive us into heterodoxy?

You know what the answer must be.

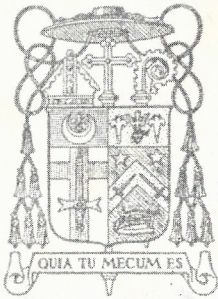
After the above paragraphs were written we learned of the latest *Wanderer* mention of us. A correspondent there quotes a letter allegedly from Edward T. Hickey, Chancellor of the Diocese of Covington, which includes these words:

"The Rev. Fr. Francis Nugent is not an 'Oratorian', he has no official standing in the diocese of Covington, his publications have no ecclesiastical approbation of the Bishop of Covington, and there is no such place as the 'Lexington Oratory' legitimately approved by the Bishop of Covington or the Major Superior of the Oratorian Fathers".

Now, one could cite the Catholic Directory for the last four years (see under the Diocese of Covington, religious houses) and wonder how a Community which was not approved by the Bishop of Covington could have been included in the official clergy list sent to the publishers of that Directory each year by the Covington Chancery.

And one could point out that there is no Major Superior of the Oratorian Fathers, each Oratory being entirely autonomous and having its own Superior, in accordance with the intention and decree of St. Philip Neri; and one could also recall that it was the Bishop of Covington who caused the Oratory to be set up in his diocese and urged that Lexington be its site.

And . . . but enough. Let us simply extract from our files a) a letter from Edward T. Hickey of two and a half years ago, and b) a clipping from *The Messenger* (the official diocesan paper) of four years ago. Let us reproduce this material photographically and print it with this letter and let our friends decide whom they will believe.



DIocese OF COVINGTON

1140 MADISON AVENUE, COVINGTON, KENTUCKY

April 6, 1964

Dear Father Nugent:

Just a few lines to let you know how thoroughly I enjoyed the Spring issue of "Christendom". It was attractive, charming, instructive, entertaining and, above all erudite. It should do much to raise the cultural level of all who read it.

Believe me to be most sincere when I tell you: "Keep up the good work!". For what it is worth, you can be assured that you have my highest commendation for yourself and your work, at all times and in all places.

With continued prayers that God may bless you always, I am,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Edward T. Hickey

Rt. Rev. Msgr. Edward T. Hickey.

Reverend Francis Nugent, C.O.,
The Oratory,
Box 1326,
Lexington, Kentucky.

enc.

Establish Center Near Lexington

By KATHRYN TOERNER

The Oratorian Fathers are establishing an oratory in the Covington Diocese at the invitation of the Most Rev. Richard H. Ackerman, S.T.D.

Located on U.S. 27 near Paris in Bourbon County, the Oratorian Fathers wish to establish a cultural center which will serve as a vehicle to better relations with non-Catholics by dispelling vicious rumors and misconceptions about Catholics. Through the Arts, the Oratorians hope to demonstrate that Catholics, too, participate in intellectual and cultural activities. Members of European affiliates have been invited to the Bourbon County oratory to aid in the exposition of these activities.

A GROUP of secular priests and brothers who voluntarily live in community, the Oratorians do not engage in parish work, but follow intellectual pursuits and give missions and retreats.

Furnished very simply, the oratory serves to facilitate the priests and brothers in living a life according to the philosophy of St. Philip Neri, their founder, who, during the Reformation, believed that only priests living in community could counteract the trouble among clergymen.

THE ORATORIANs have affiliates throughout the world. They do not have a central motherhouse and each oratory, being independent of the other, is under the di-

rection of the superior elected at that oratory.

It is a purely voluntary act on the part of any secular priest who joins the Oratorians. Unlike orders of priests, the Oratorians must support the community. They must have a dowry, an inheritance or a talent, such as a literary or oratorical talent, which can serve as a means of income. See Oratorian Fathers, page 7A

Oratorian Fathers

Continued from page 1A

port the community. They must have a dowry, an inheritance or a talent, such as a literary or oratorical talent, which can serve as a means of income.

ST. PHILIP by no means wanted them to be bound by vow or oath. He contended that if anyone desired a more perfect state and wished to take vows, he could enter any of the many religious orders. He wished his congregation to be composed of persons who would serve God freely and without bond, devoting themselves to the salvation of their own souls and those of their neighbors and to the observance of the Institute, which consisted chiefly in prayer, in the delivery of the word of God, in the frequentation of the Sacraments and in mutual charity, which, he added, was to be the sole bond of his disciples.

St. Philip had a singular power of giving consolation. Through his

compassion and tenderness of heart, he kept young people from vices, cared for his penitents when they were ill, delivered many from melancholy and scruples and freed many from temptations and troubles. He was endowed with this privilege of removing temptation after the Holy Spirit manifested Himself to him in the form of a globe of fire, which entered St. Philip's mouth and lodged in his throat. His heart began to swell and his ribs were fractured and thrust outward to allow room for his enlarged heart which seemed to increase in its capacity for love. The incident was not attended by pain or wound but with a joyous, burning love.

Philip had been known to press the head of one of his penitents, in the time of temptation, to his heart, and the temptation not only left but never returned to the person.

St. Philip was humble, pure, patient and practiced mortifications of all kinds. Many famous individuals have been attracted to his prescribed way of life. In England, the Oratorians were founded by Henry Newman at Birmingham and Frederick William Palen in London. In France, St. Francis de Sales founded an oratory at Thnon.

The Covington Diocese can consider it a milestone in its history to be joined by such devoted forces as these men who follow the life of St. Philip Neri.

My friends, we are telling God's truth.

Look into your own heart and see on whose side you will stand. See whether it is we or those who oppose us who are preaching you the same blessed Faith that you learned at your dear Mother's knees. And then write to us that you have put your hand in ours, and will not draw it away, as we renew our promise to the Lord Jesus and our Mother Mary and our Father Saint Philip and all the angels and saints, that we will stand yet with Him; though many walk no more with Him, we will stay, for to whom shall we go but to Him Who hast the words of everlasting life?