



The Smoke of Satan: Conservative and Traditionalist Dissent in Contemporary American Catholicism

Michael W. Cuneo

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At the site of the Vatican Pavilion at the old World's Fair grounds in Queens, New York, where the late Veronica Lueken for years came to receive messages from the Blessed Virgin Mary, her followers still gather with apocalyptic expectancy before a portable statue of the Virgin. They are convinced that virtually the entire world, including the great majority of Catholics, will soon perish in a horrible chastisement, and that they alone will be saved. In the theological underground of American Catholicism, mostly hidden from public view, the followers of Veronica are just a few among the many who regard both the broader society and the broader church as irredeemably corrupt. Now, Michael Cuneo's *The Smoke of Satan* brings these groups vividly to life, shedding valuable light on the current state of Catholicism in North America--and, more generally, on religion in our society.

Images on television and in the popular media have made the Christian right a household concept--but what that usually means is the *Protestant* Christian right. Cuneo's insightful, provocative study highlights the equally vigorous though less well-known *Catholic* counterpart. Ranging from the Marianists, such as the followers of "Blessed Veronica" of Bayside, to picketers at abortion clinics across the United States and Canada (militant lay Catholics who believe that "public witness" is a vocational enterprise of the highest order, one which the vast majority of bishops, priests, and nuns are too lacking in faith and nerve to perform themselves); from separatists who believe that even Rome itself has fallen and that true Catholics should withdraw and form alternate communities, to Latin Mass advocates who believe the reforms of Vatican II are the work of Satan himself; these American Catholics are united by a common conviction: in the space of just three decades, the mainstream Catholic church in the United States and elsewhere has fallen into alarming decline, and the task of preserving authentic Catholicism (and thus Christianity itself) from outright extinction has fallen to small bands of the truly faithful. As Cuneo draws striking portraits of these faithful few, he also provides some fascinating asides on contemporary issues, including an innovative analysis of the ideological relationship of right-wing Catholic groups with the militia movement and a provocative assessment of militant Catholic pro-life activism.

In 1972, speaking in the aftermath of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI said "the smoke of Satan has entered by some crack into the temple of God." In this first full-scale account of Roman Catholic fundamentalism, Cuneo details what these dissenters believe the "smoke of Satan" to be, and what they plan to do to halt its spread. Cuneo's profiles of these right-wing groups and the various strategies they have adopted in attempting to carry out this task makes for one of the most fascinating stories in contemporary American religion.

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