

# New Book on Father Feeney History: *Harvard to Harvard*, A Review

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*The following is an off-print from our website, a book review which was originally serialized in three editions of «Ad Rem», our Prior's weekly column. (www.Catholicism.org/ad-rem).*

## Part 1 of 3

The Abbot of St. Benedict Abbey in Still River has made an important contribution to the historical literature on Father Feeney and his Crusade. Abbot Gabriel Gibbs, O.S.B., one of the early members of the Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, has told “the story of Saint Benedict Center’s becoming Saint Benedict Abbey,” to quote the book’s subtitle. In a conversation I had with the Abbot last summer, he told me of the book’s imminent publication. He promised to send a copy to Brother Francis, adding that we would not agree with everything in it.

It was obvious from this conversation that Father Gabriel’s intention was to tell *his side* of the history of the Center (as the subtitle suggests), but it was also obvious that he wanted to do so in a kind way, mentioning some of the controversies that divided Father Feeney’s original followers without recounting them in an acerbic or belligerent manner. Having now read the book, I can say he accomplished just that. From my point of view, what is notably indicative of the author’s kindly approach is his most respectful treatment of Brother Francis throughout, even where he disagreed with something our beloved Superior did. I hope that in reviewing the volume frankly, I will stay within the bounds of civil and (more importantly) *charitable* discussion that the Abbot has initiated in publishing his reflections of the Center’s history.

There are many things to recommend the book. First, it is very readable. The early history of the Center is delightfully written by a first-hand witness with a good memory for names, faces, and dates, as well as access to very detailed records in the Abbey’s archives. Accounts are published here of life in the Cambridge days that haven’t previously been put in print. Too, the odd relationship between Harvard and the militant Catholics of the Center is put in a broader historical context than any previous work has done, and very effectively. I will get to some other good points soon. First, I should explain my approach to the book review. Then, I would like to be frank about my perspective, for it is evident that I have a bias and I want to expose it right away.

My review will be done in two principal divisions (probably comprising more than two editions of «*Ad Rem*»). The approach will be simple: What I liked in the book and what I didn’t. If I end up dwelling more on the specifics of material I disagree with, this is not an indication that such material dominates the book. The contrary is true, for most of *Harvard to Harvard* was a very positive reading experience for me. Brother Francis’ assessment was the same. This leads to the question of my bias: Relative to the Abbot, I am on the “other side,” to use a phrase that recurs throughout his work. That is, I am one of those Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary who do not think that Saint Benedict Center *should have* become Saint Benedict Abbey — surely not the way it did so. Or, to be more precise, we don’t think that the majority of the male members of the original Saint Benedict Center should have taken the direction that terminated in their becoming Saint Benedict Abbey. The reasons for this will become manifest as this review progresses.

**Frank Assessment of Liberal Hierarchy.** First, the “good points.” Father Gabriel Gibbs is now an Abbot of the Benedictine Order, a prelate of the Catholic Church in good standing with

the Church's hierarchy, both local and Roman. Yet, in narrating the history of Father Feeney and his run-ins with the liberal hierarchy (both local and Roman), the mitred author pulls no punches. He speaks as candidly as Father Feeney did, and we still do, about the episcopal malfeasance in orthodoxy and orthopraxy that led to Father Feeney's standing alone in a hostile ecclesial environment. The Abbot is openly critical of Father's Jesuit superiors and, especially, of Cardinal Cushing. (It is an aside, but those who think the Cardinal takes too much criticism from Father Feeney's disciples should realize that the Cardinal is now freely criticized for his liberalism by *many* others. E.g., do a Google search for these terms "Cushing" and "personally opposed, but" for a real eye opener!)

Some of the book's criticism is downright embarrassing for our hierarchy. I write within days of the newly-appointed Archbishop of Warsaw retiring his post in the midst of scandal. This was caused by Archbishop Wielgus' lie (there's no other word) concerning his collaboration with communist thugs in Poland. Another Polish bishop stepped down in the immediate wake of the controversy and the tremors are still reverberating as I write. The Abbot's book shows something similar — that the liberals who had legitimate authority in the Church in America lied in the case of Father Feeney, and more than once. The comparisons, from the public record, of who-knew-what-and-when to public statements made by Cardinals Cushing and Wright would leave these eminent churchmen with faces as red as their hats, if they were alive to read the book.

The approach to this episcopal dishonesty is subtle, or, at least, indirect. After presenting the evidence, the Abbot gives the reader the tools to make his own assessment. One is led to the brink, but to cry foul is left to the reader.

**The Americanist Milieu.** Another plus for the book is its placing of the events surrounding Father Feeney in their sociological context. It was not simply a matter of a priest defending a dogma against a liberal archbishop. It *was* that, but it was also much more. The milieu is important to explain what really happened, for Archbishop Cushing was neither a theologian nor a stickler of doctrine (*of any kind*). If the major priorities for Boston's Ordinary had not been interfered with, things would have gone along swimmingly. But what interested Archbishop Richard Cushing was power and the means to arrive at it (politics and money). Social respectability was important for acquiring these things. Writes the Abbot:

The old guard among the Boston Yankees, which the classic "Harvard Man" typified, was growing increasingly alarmed at the sheer number of Roman Catholic personalities moving into major public roles. They sought to blunt this Catholic ascendancy by promoting a sort of pietistic nationalism in which no religion could dominate the culture. Within this pluralistic framework, claims on an exclusive truth were viewed as bigotry. Both Archbishop Cushing and the Harvard authorities, by 1949, had undoubtedly enshrined the virtue of tolerance as their sacred cow.

To have some Catholics saying there was no salvation outside the Catholic Church was hardly going to sit well with the Boston Irish on their way up the social ladder — or with any Catholics on their way up, for that matter. It has been said that the American Catholic Church's greatest sin has been to turn itself into an American "denomination." By the time St. Benedict Center came along with *extra ecclesiam*

*nulla salus* pretty much the whole Catholic hierarchy in this country wanted to soft-pedal that doctrine. (p. 40)

But the stink over Catholic orthodoxy went beyond Harvard Square or the Archdiocese of Boston, or even the United States. Americanism and its evil siblings had spread everywhere, even to Rome. To this effect, Father Gabriel cites John Deedy, the founding editor of the (Worcester, Mass.) *Catholic Free Press* and then managing editor of *Commonweal* magazine:

assessing the state of the Church in the United States in the years following the Second Vatican Council. Ecumenism, which that Council embraced, was coming into vogue in the post-World War II era, Mr. Deedy observed. But, he added: “if the old Catholic premise *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*... were still in place... there wouldn’t be an ecumenical movement.” [!!!] The “rigorist interpretation” of “the doctrine” by St. Benedict Center, Mr. Deedy speculated, “caused embarrassment so acute in the United States and in Rome so as to force suppression of the idea through the suppression of (Father) Feeney.” (p. 86.)

Deedy was a liberal, but his frankness in the matter is telling. Father Feeney got in the way of the modern program of a “kinder, gentler” Catholic Church, one which apologizes for her over-zealous history, and *no longer condemns error* because man is now more mature (as per Pope John XXIII). One of the ironies of the era is that, not yet used to being so kind and gentle, the hierarchy dealt with Father Feeney ruthlessly.

It is my own estimation, but there is one possible explanation for Pope Pius XII’s involvement in the Father Feeney affair. In the post-war era, the red menace was a serious concern for the supreme pontiff. Everyone knew that the only world power that could balance the USSR was the USA. Pius could not be crossing the American hierarchy at a time when he wanted American cooperation in his opposition to communism. For all his faults, like most of the American hierarchy, Cardinal Cushing was known to be anti-communist. With Bishop Wright pulling all the strings in the background in Rome, all the Pope had to do was not come to Father Feeney’s defense and the case would not have to involve him personally.

**The Marchetti Selvaggiani Letter.** The final positive aspect of the book I will touch on here is its treatment of the Letter from the Holy Office, *Suprema haec sacra*, which is commonly known by the name of its (putative) author, Francisco Cardinal Marchetti-Selvaggiani (it is known to some Italophobes as “the Macaroni-Spaghetti Letter”). Here, I will quote from the book at length:

The Marchetti-Selvaggiani letter acknowledged that “among those things which the Church has always preached and will never cease to preach is contained also that infallible statement by which we are taught there is no salvation outside the Church.” But, it said, “This dogma must be understood in that sense in which the Church herself understands it.” And, citing Pope Pius XII’s June 29, 1943 encyclical letter, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, it said the Church “reproves both those who exclude from eternal salvation all united to the Church only by implicit desire, and those who falsely assert that men can be saved equally well in every religion.” *However, that 1943 encyclical letter never mentions “implicit desire.”* To the con-

trary, it defines a member of the Church in unequivocal terms:

“Only those are members of the Church who have received the Baptism of regeneration and profess the true faith and who are not, to their misfortune, separated from the Body as a whole or cut off from her through very grave faults by legitimate authority.”

*Mystici Corporis Christi* allows that some may, through an “unconscious desire and longing,” have “a relationship” with the Church. However, far from declaring this relationship sufficient for salvation, the Pope’s encyclical clearly states that it leaves them “deprived of those many heavenly gifts and helps which can only be enjoyed in the Catholic Church.” Still, the Marchetti-Selvaggiani letter asserted that it was St. Benedict Center which had “misinterpreted the axiom that ‘outside the Church there is no salvation’ in a way ‘harmful both to those within the Church and to those without’.”

The direct involvement of Pope Pius XII in the translation of the Marchetti-Selvaggiani letter was detailed by Cardinal John J. Wright in “A Personal Reminiscence” of the Holy Father that he wrote for publication in the English-language edition of *L’Osservatore Romano*, the daily newspaper of Vatican City, on March 11, 1976. On March 26, 1976, it was republished in *The Pilot* .

While there has never been independent corroboration of the events, Cardinal Wright, while the prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, recalled that at the time the 1949 letter was in preparation he, *a young auxiliary bishop, was dispatched to Rome* “to answer certain questions about the (St. Benedict Center) movement in the mind of the astonished Supreme Pontiff.” [Sound fishy?] Without doubt Bishop Wright welcomed the assignment, not necessarily because from an early advocate he had become a bitter antagonist of St. Benedict Center, but because that summer he was marking his fortieth birthday (July 18, 1949). What better place to celebrate it than in the Eternal City where he had studied for the priesthood, where he had been ordained (coincidentally by Francesco Cardinal Marchetti-Selvaggiani) and where he had earned his doctoral degree in sacred theology! (pp. 69-71; emphasis mine.)

After quoting Cardinal Wright’s florid description of his meeting with Pope Pius XII (which, “unfortunately, there is no way to verify”), the Abbot concludes:

The now-famous Marchetti-Selvaggiani letter has become the strongest ecclesiastical argument against Father Leonard Feeney and St. Benedict Center. However, both its roots and its legitimacy are problematic. (p. 72.)

An understated, but valid, conclusion.

### Part 2 of 3

In the last edition, I mentioned that my review of Abbot Gabriel’s book would cover both its positive and its negative aspects. I also mentioned that, should the parts we view as less favor-

able get more attention, *it is not because those outnumber the good parts*. Most of the book is a delight to read. If I dwell at length on the negative, it is because the contrasts between the way Father Gabriel and Brother Francis view the Center's history and the issues which divided Father Feeney's followers serve as points of clarification for our own position.

**The Mass.** *Ora et Labora* (pray and work) is the Benedictine motto. Obviously, how monks pray is a point of great importance to their state in life. While the same can be said of all religious and of all Catholics, the monk has a certain special vocation to pray the social prayer of the Church (the liturgy) and they are at that business for much of their day. There is a short chapter on the Mass in *Harvard to Harvard*. The chapter touches upon the thorny question of the *Novus Ordo* vs. the Classical Roman Rite (or "Tridentine Rite" as it is often improperly called). Here is a major point of disagreement between the Abbey and our group. But even here, we can agree with the very apt words the Abbot uses to conclude this chapter:

Father Leonard was a great proponent of the dictum, *lex orandi est lex credendi* (the law of praying is the law of believing); however, he always insisted on doctrine first. Without a solid doctrinal foundation, liturgy soon deteriorates into sheer aesthetics. Back in 1949, when the Archbishop of Boston obscured the single, clear path to salvation, a fracturing of the Church's prayer life was sure to follow. And it did! Everything still looked perfect. 20,000 members of the Holy Name Society marched through Boston's main thoroughfare; the Mass of Trent was the only Mass being offered; the parish churches were full and new ones being built all the time, but the Faith which held all this together was already slipping away. If the Faith were restored, we would have the right liturgy.

Amen! These words hit the nail on the head. They also contradict entirely the Abbey's embracing of the New Rite. True enough it is not sufficient to have the Traditional Rite when your theology is modernist. But it is also true that the Traditional Rite and modernist theology could not get along together long. The modernist theology had to develop its own liturgy. *Lex orandi lex credendi*. The New Rites (not only the Mass, but the other liturgical rites as well) are those rites. This is not to say that there is heresy proper in the actual text of the *Novus Ordo* in Latin, but there is a terrible watering down, one Father Feeney did not approve.

These are not the knee-jerk reactions of a rabid reactionary. In his book, *The Reform of the Roman Liturgy*, the respected liturgist, Monsignor Klaus Gamber, informs us that:

One thing is certain, the new (liberal) theology was a major force behind the liturgical reforms. (p. 44. The word *liberal*, in parentheses, is in Monsignor Gamber's original.)

We also find this gem in the Monsignor's book:

Without doubt, Martin Luther was the first person who reformed the liturgy; he did so systematically and for theological reasons. (p. 41)

Monsignor Gamber was no contentious armchair theologian of a traditionalist, but a respected German intellectual. The introduction of his book was written by none other than Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger.

The principle points of the “reform” (demolition) of the New Mass — from the offertory prayers inadequately expressive of sacrifice, to the removal of genuflections honoring the Blessed Sacrament, to the hacking apart of the Roman Canon, to the mutilation of the propers in such a way as to play down certain key doctrines (*including no salvation outside the Church*), all of them — fit in with the new theology and the new, ecumenical, way of doing things — and Father Feeney was against them. (For a sample of the changes in the Mass downplaying doctrine, see our “The Contradiction of Core” and scroll down to the subheading “The Law of Praying.”) In short, the Mass was made something less offensive to the people who rejected the Mass in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. It is, therefore, less expressive of the Catholic Faith.

St. Pius X’s much-abused phrase, “active and conscious participation” — used to describe the way Catholics should assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass — is not a justification for the demolition of the Roman Rite. But the Abbot uses the saint’s phrase throughout as an apologetic for the Abbey’s adherence to the New Mass. It is painful to see a disciple of Father Feeney using the logic of the enemy. (The question is obvious: *If that* is what St. Pius meant, why did he retain the traditional integrity of the Roman Rite?) Father Feeney demanded that the brothers and sisters memorize certain portions of the Mass (Brother Francis, at 93, still knows most of the Canon by heart). He wanted his followers to have a great knowledge of the Mass so that they could pray it with the priest, but it would be madness to make this “participation” some approving prelude to the innovations of the New Mass, as the Abbot implicitly does in the book.

In short, Father Feeney’s advocating a greater awareness of the prayers of the Mass in no way justifies altering those prayers to make them more agreeable to modernists and Protestants.

**Religious Liberty.** In the chapter entitled “Vatican II and Religious Liberty,” Abbot Gabriel puts himself to the strange task of synthesizing Father Feeney’s thinking with that of his fellow-Jesuit, Father John Courtney Murray. Whereas most would consider Father Feeney and Father Murray to be at opposite theological poles, the Abbot claims,

In actual fact, their intellectual legacy shows the two Jesuits were more aligned than most observers would ever concede. (p. 229)

He goes on to praise Father Murray’s thinking on Church-State relations:

With inimitable Jesuit refinements Father Murray reframed the question of freedom of religion as a question of the competence of the public powers in religious matters. He maintained that the state, as such, is incapable of making religious or theological assertions and that a freedom from governmental coercion is founded on the dignity of the human person. He maintained that there is an inextricable link between man’s inner freedom to choose — free will — and the external freedom from political restrictions of the free exercise of religion. But, he also stressed, the two freedoms are distinct. While preserving the immunity of one’s conscience from coercion, Father Murray never denied that everyone has an obligation to inform his or her conscience. (p. 230)

It is true that Father Murray’s theories did not justify what came after Vatican II in the name of “religious liberty,” i.e., that we are each free to believe or behave as we want to regardless of what the Church teaches. Father Murray advocated the obligation all men have of adhering to the

truth. However, for all that, Father Murray’s “Jesuit refinements” on the subject of Church-State relations were still the refinements of a liberal, Americanist Catholic. The “rights” of a Moslem to erect a mosque in a Catholic city (e.g., Rome), or of a Jehovah’s Witness to pass out tracts attacking the divinity of Jesus Christ — *rights supposedly based on our human dignity* — are non extant, having no basis in the natural law or the divine law.

The kind of separation of Church and State that Father Murray advocated was condemned by St. Pius X as “an absolutely false and most pernicious thesis.” A host of other popes joined this saintly pontiff in condemning the notions that (a) the state as a moral person has no duty to recognize the true religion and (b) the Catholic state must not suppress heresy in the external forum. Pope Leo XIII, in his *Longinqua oceani* warned that:

it would be very erroneous to draw the conclusion that in America is to be sought the type of the most desirable status of the Church, or that it would be universally lawful or expedient for the State and the Church to be, as in America, dissevered and divorced.

Yet, in his praise of the liberal Jesuit, the Abbot notes that:

Father Murray eventually won the sponsorship of prominent American (arch)bishops in his crusade to have Rome accept as universal teaching the concept of religious liberty professed in the United States’ Declaration of Independence (1776) and proclaimed in the U.S. Constitution (1787) and its Bill of Rights (1791). (p. 231)

Abbot Gabriel’s paean to Father Murray contains this caricature of the traditional teaching:

However, few will deny that Father Murray masterfully wrested the foundation of religious freedom away from the embarrassing position of those theologians who insisted that every political leader had an obligation to use his or her God-given authority to prosecute heresy because error has no rights. (p. 231)

This ignores the legitimate “refinements” that were built into the traditional theology, distinctions concerning the Catholic State and the non-Catholic State, as well as on external and internal forum. We are not, for instance, advocating forced conversions or suppression of non-Catholic religions.

Far from being theologically allied with Father Feeney, Father Murray’s thought is liberal. In the words of Father Gabriel:

Further, the focus he {Father Murray} placed on the dignity of the human person has become the theological standard for the Church... . (p. 231)

The “theological standard for the Church” — if that means what can be distilled from the (non-infallible) documents and policies emanating from the Holy See during these times of profound confusion — embraces the ecumenical indifferentism that Father Feeney so roundly condemned. At the center of this indifferentism is a false conception of human dignity that attenuates the Church’s perennial teachings on grace and original sin. This is the theological ambit of Father John Courtney Murray, not of Father Leonard Feeney. It is part and parcel of a whole new outlook on man, the world, and the Church, an outlook ultimately antithetical to

Catholic tradition, that is, to Christian doctrine.

Father Murray himself says:

The Declaration {*Dignitatis Humanae*, which Father Murray helped to author} has opened the way toward *a new confidence in ecumenical relationships, and a new straightforwardness in relationships between the Church and the world.* (The Documents of Vatican II, Walter M. Abbot, S.J., general editor, p.673. In the Abbott edition, Murray wrote the introduction to the Declaration, *Dignitatis Humanae*.)

Apparently, in her previous teaching, the Church was being *devious* with the world she was trying to convert, as that is the opposite of “straightforward.”

The great Benedictine Abbot, Dom Guéranger (who gets very favorable mention in *Harvard to Harvard*) was a spiritual writer much beloved of Father Feeney. Dom Guéranger was one of the great ultra-montanists, along with such luminaries as Louis Veuillot, Edouard Cardinal Pie, Venerable Emmanuel d’Alzon, Joseph de Maistre, Louis de Bonald, and Juan Donoso Cortes. These great thinkers, who defended the Church’s traditional social teaching in the face of Revolutionary liberalism, provided much of the intellectual ammunition used by the popes of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to condemn the very notions that Father Murray would later defend with “inimitable Jesuit refinements.”

In the entry in his masterful *Liturgical Year* for the Feast of St. Augustine, Abbot Guéranger goes to great lengths to show that the Doctor of Grace, though advocating mildness toward the Donatist heretics, eventually saw that they had to be suppressed by the Catholic Emperor:

Such mildness was certainly worthy of the Church; but it was destined to be one day brought forward against her in contrast to certain other facts of her history, by a school of liberalism that can grant rights and even preeminence to error. Augustine acknowledges his first idea to have been that constraint should not be used to bring any one into the unity of Christ; he believed that preaching and free discussion should be the only arms employed for the conversion of heretics. But on the consideration of what was taking place before his eyes, the very logic of his charity brought him over to the opinion of his more ancient colleagues in the episcopate.

{There follows a long quote from one of St. Augustine’s epistles, which ends with these words:} ‘No one can become good in spite of himself; nevertheless, the rigorous laws, of which they complain, bring deliverance not only to individuals, but to whole cities, by freeing them from the bonds of untruth and causing them to see the truth, which the violence or the deceits of the schismatics had hidden from their eyes. Far from complaining, their gratitude is now boundless and their joy complete; their feasts and their chant are unceasing.’

Father Murray’s teachings and influence had the net effect of making Spain no longer a confessional Catholic nation. The same goes for the Catholic cantons of Switzerland. With the present Islamification of Europe, the traditional social teaching takes on a new attractiveness. Right now, Bishop Beteri, the secretary of the Italian episcopal conference, is still trying to uphold the



privileged role the Church still enjoys in Italy, and prominent non-Catholics are crying foul (see “Italian bishop in dispute over legislation on religious equality” on the CWN site).

For a summary of the Church’s traditional social teaching, one would do well to read an author Father Feeney admired, Father Denis Fahey (see *The Catholic World of Father Denis Fahey* by Brother Lawrence Mary M.I.C.M., Tert.). For a quick summary on the traditional doctrine of Christ the King, see our *Mancipia* for October, 2006.

Some may argue that the issues of the New Mass vs. the Traditional Mass and of the Social Kingship of Christ pale in comparison to the issue of no salvation outside the Church. This is true at a certain microscopic level and in terms of the foundational importance of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, but the argument misses the point. The Church’s teaching, worship, and practice are all of a piece. “No salvation outside the Church,” in all its vigor, fits into a Catholic world view incompatible with the new liturgical rites and the modern conception of the rights of man.

### Part 3 of 3

**The “Regularization.”** When Abbot Gabriel told me that there would be things Brother Francis would not agree with in his book, I assumed that these would be matters pertaining to the “regularization,” that is, the process by which many of the brothers and some of the sisters had *apparent* canonical censures removed from themselves and Father Feeney. What I found when I read the book was that the position of Brother Francis, Brother Hugh, and the majority of the sisters comes out looking quite good. In other words, our group (“the other side,” as Father Gabriel refers to us) is justified.

As one example of how this is so, I instance the secrecy surrounding the discussions of the community’s regularization. I had heard about this from some of the older religious on “our side” and the Abbot’s account agrees with theirs. Brother Francis, who would broach no backing down, no silencing of our doctrinal Crusade, was kept in the dark about what was happening. There was much cloak-and-dagger (or cassock and dagger, as the case may be). In short, those known to be “no-compromise,” were deliberately kept in the dark vis-a-vis dealings with the hierarchy.

Here is the Abbot:

The bottom line was that we coexisted for six years with the other group {of brothers} right in the same building — and we survived. There was a positive side, though: we discovered previously-unknown alcoves and niches where we could discuss matters in private! (p. 172)

It should be kept in mind that Father Feeney was weakened by Parkinson’s disease, whose cognitive effects had taken their toll; he simply did not know what was happening at times. Sister Catherine, the very capable administrator and motivator, had gone to her reward by this time. There were now new dynamics of leadership with other interests being guarded. In the new circle of leadership, whose secret meetings excluded any other voice, the desire to achieve respectability and ecclesiastical recognition was winning out over the drive to keep up the fight.

At one point, four brothers made a top-secret trip to Rome which ended up in something of a comedy of errors. Father Gabriel tells the story without any noticeable embarrassment or shame:

We knew that if word got out about our trip to Rome, the Sisters in St. Ann's House and Brother Hugh (MacIsaac) and Brother Francis (Maluf) and the others with them in St. Pius X House would be furious. So, we pretended that the four of us were going for a visit to my home in Hornell, N.Y. Unfortunately for us, a student at the Angelicum (University), who knew the Sisters, chanced to meet me on a Roman street corner. He immediately telephoned the Sisters and told them we were in Rome. The Sisters, naturally, told Father Feeney and he, then, told Brother Xavier (Connelly) that "Brother Gabriel is in Rome." Brother Xavier showed surprise at the possibility, but Father Leonard insisted it was true, saying "Sister Teresa (Beneway) told me that somebody she knows saw him in Rome this morning."

Well, when we came back we didn't admit to Father or to the Sisters or to anyone else "over there" — despite their insistence — where we had been. Nevertheless, they certainly believed we had been in Rome and they accused us of betraying Father and of betraying our past and they only intensified their efforts to have Father Leonard deny that he had been reconciled. (p. 160-161)

Not exactly the kind of behavior which engenders trust, is it? Neither does it stir up one's admiration for the virtue of obedience in the brothers involved. The protagonists of these maneuvers were among those who later agreed to keep silent regarding "no salvation outside the Church." It would seem, then, that the suspicions of the other side proved well founded.

The Abbot recounts every major step leading to the brothers of St. Therese House becoming a Benedictine Abbey. From Father Feeney's regularization to the profession of Faith made by "the twenty-nine" to the various stages of ecclesiastical recognition the group obtained as religious to the ordinations and, finally, to the Priory being elevated to the status of an Abbey. The story is told with a narrative style that sustains the reader's interest. But there is something of a funny aftertaste in certain parts. What struck me throughout this section was the frequent use of phrases like "and that was the next step on our becoming an Abbey." The reader is tempted — or this one was, anyway — to think that the author considers the goal of the Crusade to have been the Abbatial dignity. After years of ecclesiastical oblivion and the shame of canonical irregularity, Saint Benedict Center is now an Abbey — this is the triumph. Our idea of victory would be much different.

Among the unpleasant realities of the long process of achieving this dignity was the strange set of alliances which formed. Cardinal Wright, who never really changed, is transformed from being an enemy to a friend of the Center. Abbot Primate (later Archbishop) Rembert Weakland is given prominence as one of the Abbey's advocates. So, too, is Father Basil Pennington. Now, Archbishop Weakland's crimes against nature were not yet notorious, I guess, but his liberalism was sure known. Yet, he comes across as a good guy in the book.

Father Pennington deserves special mention as one who gave counsel to Brother Gabriel and

his side:

At about that time, Rev. Basil Pennington, O.S.C.O., a Trappist friend of the Center family at St. Joseph Abbey in Spencer, in southwestern Worcester County, suggested that we investigate an affiliation with the Order of St. Benedict. Father Basil, *a gifted writer and internationally-renowned authority on monastic spirituality* who, for a time, was abbot of the Cistercian Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Conyers, Ga., noted from the beginning both our identity (St. Benedict Center) and our lifestyle had been Benedictine in orientation. ...

Accordingly, with an introduction by Father Basil, Brother Cyril and I went to St. Vincent Archabbey in Latrobe, Pa., in September of 1975 to explore the possibility with the Benedictines' abbot-primate, Abbot Rembert Weakland, O.S.B. (pg. 190, emphasis mine)

The reason I italicized the words “a gifted writer and internationally-renowned authority on monastic spirituality” is that the man deemed worthy of these laudatory comments has distinguished himself as one of the concoctors of false spirituality known as “Centering Prayer”:

In the mid-seventies, Trappist Abbot Thomas Keating asked the monks, “Could we put the Christian tradition into a form that would be accessible to people . . . who have been instructed in an Eastern technique and might be inspired to return to their Christian roots if they knew there was something similar in the Christian tradition?” (*Intimacy with God*, 15). Frs. William Menniger and M. Basil Pennington took up the challenge, and centering prayer is the result. In a few short years it has spread all over the world.

Centering prayer originated in St. Joseph's Abbey, a Trappist monastery in Spencer, Massachusetts. During the twenty years (1961–1981) when Keating was abbot, St. Joseph's held dialogues with Buddhist and Hindu representatives, and a Zen master gave a week-long retreat to the monks. A former Trappist monk who had become a Transcendental Meditation teacher also gave a session to the monks. (From “The Danger of Centering Prayer” by John Dreher)

As the author of that article goes on to show, Centering prayer is *not* Christian prayer. There is a beautiful Cistercian-Trappist tradition of prayer and spirituality, with wonderful authors like Dom Vitalis Lahodey, Dom Chautard, and Father M. Eugene Boylan (some of our own favorite spiritual writers), but Father Pennington is more of the Thomas Merton syncretic stripe of spirituality. Something is very wrong when one of Father Feeney's disciples gives such praise to a habited new-age guru.

I should hasten to add that, although the strange association with Father Pennington is something I find reprehensible, I am not making any accusation that the brothers at the Abbey have adopted any of his weird spirituality. To the best of my knowledge, this is not the case. But the association (and, especially, the public praise) manifests a disturbing spirit of indifferentism and ambiguity. If becoming Benedictines was the right thing to do (note the hypothetical), then dealing with Abbot Rembert Weakland was something they had no choice in, given that he was the head of the Benedictine Order at the time. But having such a dangerous spiritual eclectic in your

circle of friends is a matter of choice. In short, while you can't pick your Abbot-Primate, you can pick your friends.

The political agreement to keep silent on no salvation outside the Church is related to these strange associations. Without the associations the silencing would not have been an issue. Both betray a degree of disloyalty to the foundational principles upon which Father Feeney's Crusade were based and that disloyalty had its effects, some of which have been brought out by the criticisms I have already made. Probably the most tragic effect was the serious doctrinal compromise in one of the original members. Father Cyril Karam, one of the four brothers on the above-mentioned Rome trip, began to embrace modernist theology. He became enamored of the likes of Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Rahner, and other theological miscreants, to the scandal and protest of many in the community. (As *Harvard to Harvard* relates, Father Cyril left Still River to begin St. Mary's Priory in Petersham, Massachusetts.)

While I find it necessary to put the foregoing paragraph in the public record on the matter, I do so neither as blanket statement against everyone in the Abbey nor an *ad hominem* against the Abbot.

**Summary of the Book's Value: "The Issue."** Having just been so negative in my commentary, I feel the need to conclude with some positive aspects of the book. One of these is a wonderful defense of monasticism. Not all of us need be missionaries in the active apostolate; the Church has always had monks whose life was exclusively (or nearly so) dedicated to prayer. It is one of the condemned tenets of Americanism that such a contemplative life is useless. Another fine passage is the chapter entitled "Our Spirituality in Summary." Leaving out what is specifically Benedictine in this chapter, its contents are equally applicable to us.

The last word will go to the Abbot himself, but first I would like to comment on what I consider the book's real worth. No matter what disagreements exist between Saint Benedict Center in New Hampshire and Saint Benedict Abbey in Massachusetts, the Abbot is now telling the world very unambiguously that Father Feeney was right, that he was treated unjustly, and that his cause must prevail if the Church is to overcome the crisis now afflicting her. These are all good things. What is particularly encouraging in this regard is the Abbot's position in the Church. The fact that such a man has "gotten away" with stating the case so clearly gives us hope that things are on the mend, *at least in some small measure*. (Let us not be naïve!) In recent years, people have begun to let their guard down regarding the institutionalized liberalism plaguing the Church. The "Great Facade," while still in place, has many cracks in it. Frank estimates of the disastrous nature of the liturgical reforms coming from high places and honest acknowledgments of the non-binding character of Vatican II's teachings are among these cracks. Father Gabriel's book is a chisel to make at least one more fissure in the Great Facade.

**Estimation of the Present Crisis.** In a chapter entitled "The Theological Dialectic," we read Father Gabriel's estimate of the doctrinal state of affairs in the Church, something he blames largely on the Marchetti Selvaggiani Letter:

In the last sixty years, whenever a Church document would assert or imply that the Roman Catholic Church is the one true Church founded by Jesus Christ, that fact or the implications drawn from it would be seemingly counterbalanced by state-

ments declaring the opposite. Some in authority have even proposed the idea that, “You can hold what you hold if you allow us to hold what we hold,” even when the two positions appear to be contradictions. (p. 237)

This lament will resonate loudly with those of us who have heard these remarks from bishops! Later, we come by these insights into the clerical abuse scandal:

In the recent past, the Church has been rocked to its core by the abuse scandal among clergy. However, the priest’s vital role, the salvific effect of his priestly ministry, was obscured many years ago. In fact the obscuring started as far back as 1949 when the Church, especially the Church in America, most notably the Church in Boston, the epicenter of clerical abuse today {!!!}, rejected the doctrine that the Sacraments of the Church were necessary for Salvation.

{...}

In the Old Testament, whenever the Covenant was rejected, the people became corrupt. In the New Testament, when the salvific value of the sacraments was no longer considered necessary, the priests began to become corrupt. Quicker than anyone realized, the frailty of human nature took over weak souls. While their path to sin is considered so abominable even by secular society, it was surprisingly logical. If Sacraments are not necessary, my priesthood is not necessary. Grace, salvation, heaven, what do these mean any more? What I do, or do not do, matters little.

Should we be surprised at the horrific drama of new names, more names in the daily headlines? No, the surprise is that there aren’t more. Father Leonard always said, “If you lose your Faith, you lose your morals. If you lose your morals, you will lose your Faith.” (243-244).

This subtle job of connecting the persecution of Father Feeney with the clerical abuse scandal is, we think, not baseless. Holy Scripture is insistent on the connection between sexual perversion and sins against Faith (cf. Romans 1 and 2). The book of Isaias lists among the punishments for Israel’s infidelity: “the effeminate shall rule over them” (3:4). As a fact of historical record, the first documented case of clerical abuse in the Archdiocese of Boston was 1949!

What immediately preceded the mention of clerical abuse was a passage of great beauty, worthy of Father Feeney himself and with this I shall conclude:

Not it’s time to show by our lives what we believe. ... {W}e will show by our actions that we are living for eternity, that salvation is the most important goal in life. Salvation is the reason for our existence. What did the old catechism tell us? We were put here on earth “to know, love and serve God in this life and to be happy with Him in the next.”

With this perspective in mind, everything we do as monks makes sense. Without it, nothing makes sense. A lot of the confusion and chaos that hit the Church with all the changes in the ‘60’s and ‘70’s was because priests and religious were bored with praying the Divine Office. Frankly, if one is not motivated by the salvific value of that prayer, it will become boring! But if you are excited about salvation

practically every line in the Psalms leaps out at you declaring God's saving power or praising Him for His saving love.

**-end-**

**Slaves of the Immaculate Heart of Mary**

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