

Anti-Assimilationist Retreat: Becoming Spiritually Inoculated Against Americanism

by Rosemary Fielding

In 1978, Rosemary (Hugo) Fielding, reared and (some-what) educated as a Roman Catholic, was initiated into an Indian mystical sect called Ruhani Satsang or Sant Mat and became a disciple of Master Darshan Singh. She was living at an ashram in Delbi at the time. Master Darshan Singh claimed to be the "Living Master," essentially "God." In 1980, after living in the United States for two years, she made a retreat under the direction of her uncle, Father John J. Hugo, a diocesan priest in Pittsburgh, whose retreat figured largely in the autobiography of Dorothy Day, The Long Loneliness, and in many of her other tracts and books. The retreat caused Fielding to return to the Faith.

Fielding writes, "This retreat, phenomenally overlooked in the Church, could be a powerful tool to help resolve the crisis in the Church today. As David Carlin shows in his book The Decline and Fall of the Catholic Church, the crisis in the American Church today is fundamentally one of profound disunity. The Catholic Church, in sociological terms, is a religious body whose essence is unity (a "territorial-church" type) but whose actual physical condition in the United States today is fragmented (a "denominational" type). As E. Michael Jones shows in The Slaughter of Cities: Urban Renewal as Ethnic Cleansing, the dispersion and fragmentation of the Catholic Church in American was largely planned and executed by American WASPs, a direct assault against the unity of Catholicism. As a result of the many antagonistic forces which both Jones and Carlin identify, all the "old ways" of being the Catholic Church do not apply in the U.S. The territorial-church never worked in the U.S., the quasi-ghetto can no longer work, and the denomination and sect work toward disunity. Both Jones and Carlin see the need for a renewed ef-

fort at achieving the cultural unity of Catholics, a unity that is physically visible to Americans in a form, as Carlin has noted, yet to be found and will only be found "experimentally" and over many decades.

"In this time of perhaps unprecedented division within the Catholic Church, the retreat could, if supported by the institutional Church, help to perform the essential task in the Church today, which is to unite Catholics once again. The retreat — now called An Encounter With Silence — united its attendees both around the Truth and also against the enemies of Truth, which would also be the enemies of the Church. It united its attendees around the conviction that Christianity had to be practiced in the real world. It united its attendees around acknowledging that the main seducers of Catholics today — affluence and consumerism — must be resisted if their faith was to survive. Such powerful spiritual unity that the retreat engendered would help to bring about the cultural unity of Catholics in the U.S. once again. Guzman Carriquiry, undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, says that 'we need to form a new generation that lives in holiness in all the dimensions of life, that lives, not with a vague Christian inspiration devoid of content.' The retreat would form such a generation."

The retreat was given by the late Fr. Onesimus Lacouture, of Canada, and, of the Pittsburgh Diocese, Fr. Jerome Dixon, and the late Frs. John J. Hugo, Louis Farina, Joseph Meenan, and Francis Ott. Currently, Fr. Frank Erderljac of Pittsburgh gives it.

*This account of the retreat is part of a chapter in Fielding's book-in-process. The quotes from Fr. Hugo's writings are taken from his books *Your Ways Are Not My Ways*, Volumes 1 and 2 (1986) and *A Sign of Contradiction* (1947).*

Rosemary Fielding writes from Pittsburgh and is a frequent contributor to *Culture Wars*.