

THE PEACE CARDINAL

BY MICHAEL McCUSKER

A dark, thin, intense figure cloaked in the color of blood, his long hands the pale white of the heavenly host raised in blessing the bulging eyes popped from faces of shock walked down the long carpet of history toward a railed altar and the beginning of his church.

In those long-ago ghostly dust cracked days of repression, when the first hairy unbathed Christians were the Sunday afternoon entertainment for the predecessors of today's sports crowd, the frightened followers of the martyr bravely took their gospels to the streets, acting out their satires and truths in a theater of reality aptly called, in a name that has survived the centuries and subsequent snowballing tyrannies, guerrilla theater.

And his eminence, Gregoria Cardinelli Chanti, known also as the Pope of Peace (aka Frenchy), linked himself to the historic chain and walked his lonely walk down the crimson carpet of Precious Blood Catholic Church, followed by the unseen phantoms of centuries desiccated wild-eyed men and women of mercy and peace. Startled faces came awake with the crispy passage and a quiet murmur began to fill the church, the walls of which hid the sun except through mosaic glass windows. A speechless priest watched in dumbfounded amazement as he was blessed by the strange apparition clad in robes of a cardinal, a huge crucifix green and scarred by time chained to his neck, who turned and in a fast, strong voice cracking with emotion and fear of his act, called the church a false church — and a thousand of the faithful couldn't believe what was happening before their own eyes. Nothing, absolutely nothing, had prepared them for this vision, or if you will, for it truly was, this miracle, this triumph of the soul.

It was the first Sunday of Advent, two millennia after the birth of the man/God who once accosted the templars in their once hallowed halls in a time of grotesque perversion similar to this, and how many have done it since?

It was almost time for communion. The tired priest was winding up his windy sermon to the bored faithful who were fidgeting in this most laconic time of the Mass, waiting for this thing to end so they could get back to the real Sunday ritual of football and beer.

In the vestibule, unseen, regaled in the ancient robes redder than a raspberry popsickle, stood His Eminence, Gregoria Cardinelli Chanti.

It was the First Sunday of Advent, that time of prayer before the coming of the Prince of Peace.

"As Catholics we have entered into the full week prior to the Christmas of Advent," the priest said from the pulpit. Funny how all those faces look alike. Smug, gray almost, except for the women, painted in gaudy colors, renegades of nature where the general rule calls for the males to strut the plumage to whatever churches birds and lions attend.

Quiet, average, sleepy god-fearing believers tight with their nickels when the baskets were passed.

"...I ask you for your prayers for peace and alms for peace," asked the priest, who was actually a bishop. His next words choked in his throat, an agony of shock popped his eyes and dropped the gate of his jaw. The sleeping faithful stirred, awakened, and mirrored their priest.

Gregoria Cardinelli Chanti had emerged from the vestibule.

He walked toward the altar, blessing the throng. He stopped, genuflected before the huge crucifix suspended dead center over the altar, rose and passed his blessings in a graceful sweep of his pale white hand to the priest/bishop.

He then faced the startled congregation, and in a voice ringing throughout the huge cavern, shouted:

"Hypocrisy! False doctrines! False truths! How can we pray for peace and give alms for peace when the peoples of the world are engaged in domestic wars and international wars? How can we also pray for peace and give alms for peace when the Pope himself refuses to intervene in wars and the causes of wars: poverty, ignorance, intolerance and greed?"

"We are to fight — ourselves — for the true preservation of peace and love and not listen to false words.

"How can we fight for peace when the church itself is splitting into many factions over the controversy of that beautiful birth control pill and abortion....?"

That was when the cops came.

They poured in through the front of Precious Blood Catholic Church, the rear and the windows, rushing the poor lonely figure standing now silent with his hands clasped.

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ANTHONY RUSSO

Frenchy's name in real life is Robert Giglio and wits like to call him Gigolo. He was once to be a priest and spent three years in a seminary. He abandoned the cloth because he was abhorred by the hypocrisy. His name of Gregoria Cardinelli Chanti means, simply, 'Gregorian Chant'. He sings out for peace.

Hustled out of the Church of Precious Blood in a bum's rush by the brethren of the beloved Keystone Kops, he was surrounded by angry faces in blue uniforms demanding his identification.

Frenchy reached into his robes and brought out his baptismal certificate. "As a true confirmed believer of Christ," said His Eminence, "This is all the identification I need."

"Are you queer?" righteously asked one of the upholders of all that is good and decent in America.

"I am queer for Christ," the Cardinal of the streets smiled beatifically.

He was trundled into a patrol car to police headquarters where the gendarmes badgered him with questions. "Can I have a chair?" Frenchy asked after awhile and a sitting cop kicked one over to him. "Oh blessed Lord," he prayed, "Bless this chair for this weary body and bless these policemen who have been so kind and have given me this blessed chair to rest this weary body...."

"Get him out of here!!!!" screamed a cop.

Though they wouldn't admit it to Frenchy, the boys in blue were confused as to exactly what he was guilty of. A high level conference with a public defender set them straight. He was guilty of nothing.

The state cannot interfere with matters of the church.

They let him go.

Later in the afternoon, after having walked through the startled streets blessing the Sunday throngs, in his last ecclesiastical effort of the day, Frenchy began the weekly meeting of Veterans For Peace with a convocation, just like they do at city council meetings.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy," he prayed, head bared of skull cap, long white hands clasped — it was one of the seven beatitudes, the same prayer he offered the disgruntled police earlier when they drove him back to the empty Church of Precious Blood where they had found him.

"And bless the peacemakers, for they shall inherit the earth."

It was a time of wars so awful the ancient written horrors of Hell were but children's fancy in comparison. It was a time of hatreds so stark and intense, entire races were subject for slaughter.

Wars were bought and paid for by greedy hands, placating their young tools who were about to die and kill with pious treacheries called patriotism. The land, skies and seas were poisoned by the chemicals fueling the mighty war industries. Armies plundered and murdered or waited on their leashes for the war drums; ugly gray navies ranged the seas like mad baskervilles; air forces circled the skies around the clock, armed with weapons capable of immolating the earth, awaiting only the signal to strike; cities huddled in fear behind their nuclear walls of missiles jabbing heavenward.

Corporate Man thrived; Individual Man/Woman was dead. Sex was a pop ploy; love was dead.

In the midst of all this, clinging to hope like thirst-crazed lost tribes to dead rivers, wild intelligent men and women fought like outraged tigers against the suicidal genocide of their time. Like the early Christians they daunted repressive authority, were beaten and jailed, blessed their tormentors and went at it again.

And one among them shook the very walls of the corrupted temples themselves.

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The Alliance for Democracy is a new movement that seeks to end the domination of our economy, our government, our culture, our media and the environment by large corporations.

We have united to examine the ways in which various economic interests either enhance or harm the health of democracy and we focus on creating basic change.

Piecemeal reform has been rendered ineffective. We seek deep systemic alterations to establish economic and political democracy.

End
corporate
rule;
revive
democracy.

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