

“Rebel Monks in a Modern Church” - By Mary Helen Gillespe

The Daily Record (Morristown, New Jersey) - Sunday February 08, 1987

Article on Joseph Natale

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Note: This newspaper article provides further proof that Joseph Natale, the founder of the Most Holy Family Monastery, petitioned for, but was **denied**, “**Canonical Provision**” to establish his religious community by the Camden Diocese and the Vatican as they believed his order to be an “ultra-conservative” sham. Yet, it also infers that though he was defiant to accept the Church’s refusal he remained, none-the-less, in “unity” with the Holy See recognizing Pope John Paul II as the head of the Church. In short, Joseph Natale was a staunch traditionalist but “not” a sedevacantist.

967 Canon 7: “If anyone says that ... those who have been neither rightly ordained nor sent by ecclesiastical and canonical authority, but come from a different source, are lawful ministers of the word ...: let him be anathema [cf. n. 960].” - **Denzinger:** Sources of Catholic Dogma

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Berlin, NJ – Brother Joseph Natale has been fighting sin for 18 years with a method of prayer banned by the rest of the Roman Catholic Church.

He and the two monks that form his rebel band at a ramshackle farmhouse in southern New Jersey say they are preserving the word of Catholicism and its sacred traditions, untainted by the reforms and ecumenical movements that have laced the church’s teachings for 20 years.

“We are fighting Satan himself,” Natale says. But the battle is starting to show its toll on the black-robed brothers who carry hammers as much as they do prayer books.

Natale has been renounced by Church leaders and rebuffed by neighbors. The monks’ labors to build the Most Holy Family Monastery into a world-renowned sanctuary for holy men move painfully slowly. There is no place to house new followers and even completed buildings go unheated for lack of funds.

“It’s a suffering, a terrible suffering,” Natale says. “But the clergy must be an example of Christ. If we’re not willing to suffer, how can we help people?”

About 150 people attend Sunday Mass, which is said in Latin and begins at noon so the retired priest who celebrates it can come down from his northern New Jersey retirement home.

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“A lot of these people would not go to a new Mass. These people are above-average Catholics and we are giving them something,” Natale said.

Roman Catholic leaders in the Camden diocese and in Rome refuse to recognize the 55-year-old monk’s efforts, saying the ultra-conservative order is a sham.

“They are not part of the Catholic Church and we are not affiliated with them,” said the Rev. Roger McGrath of the diocese, declining further comment.

“Naturally, the diocese will say we don’t count. They’ve blasted us from every pulpit,” said Natale. “One old priest told me, ‘They’re not going to nail you to a cross, they’re going to screw you to the wall.’”

He says his mailing list has at least 10,000 names nationwide. The brothers have a print shop hidden away in the monastery where they print anti-abortion pamphlets and newsletters.

“They’ll say we’re disobedient. We’re not disobedient as far as the Church believes. We are teaching complete Catholic dogma,” he said.

Natale moved to Berlin in 1967 after leaving a Pennsylvania monastery in a rift with the church hierarchy over his refusal to obey various doctrines.

He speaks from a modest paneled office on the grounds of the monastery, 8.5 acres of brick buildings, salvaged statues and donated goods. Despite the Vatican’s rebuff, a picture of Pope John Paul II is behind Natale’s desk.

There was only a small house on the property when Natale purchased it with the aid of a benefactor. At first, he wanted to build a community for handicapped monks but the seven who joined him could not help with construction so he sent them away until the monastery was finished.

That was 18 years ago. Since then, Natale says his vision has changed to a community of concerned Catholics striving to save their religion from liberals doing away with the 16th-century Latin Tridentine Masses and other traditions while allowing such blasphemous activities like natural birth control.

He and two other monks, Brother Thomas Wedekind and Brother John Vennari, live simple lives while teaching and studying what they say is the real liturgy of the Church.

Vennari is a 28-year-old former rock musician from Philadelphia who joined the order almost seven years ago after a weekend retreat. He says there are many clergymen who agree with Natale’s view that the liberalization of the Church will destroy it.

“They are afraid to say what they think,” Vennari said. “We are trying to hold on to what is Catholic.”

Natale says Vennari is ready to be ordained a priest after years of study but they can’t find a Catholic bishop willing to perform the rite.

Natale and his followers see themselves offsetting the deeds of the modern clergy.

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“We’ll have to get done or get out of here. I think we’re going to have to get out of here,” he said shaking his head slowly.

For a year, he has been looking for a new tract in New York or Pennsylvania where his efforts can continue.

“We’ve suffered enough here in South Jersey,” Natale said.