

Priest slams feminists

by Matthew Lawrence

WINNIPEG (CUP) — Manitoba women's groups and AIDS activists are outraged by a priest who denounced the feminist movement and said AIDS is God's punishment for homosexuals at a recent Roman Catholic youth conference.

Rev. John Sembrat said the feminist movement is "a ruthless, cold, blood-thirsty, lesbian-driven hatred of men and motherhood."

About AIDS, Sembrat said: "Science won't save (homosexuals) because when they find a cure,

God will find another disease." About 400 young Catholics attended the Oct. 5-6 conference.

According to a registration pamphlet, it was organized to give young adults a chance to "get hard facts and the truth — where all could open their minds with experts and leaders in the Church."

Sembrat's view represents "the height of misogyny," said Jerri Bjornson, a member of the Charter of Rights Coalition, an alliance of Manitoba women's groups.

"As someone who claims to be a feminist and a Christian, I think those attitudes are not the ones

that should be held by the church — they're contrary to what the church believes," she said.

"I despair for young people who hear that kind of diatribe from someone they would have grown up to admire or honour," she added.

Sembrat's statements are also "frustrating" for people living with AIDS, said Rick Cable, a spokesperson for Winnipeg's Body Positive Coalition.

"I'm getting tired of these self-appointed gods making statements about things they know little about," he said.

"What really bothers me is that this individual is influencing young minds in a negative way," he said. "We're living in a time when we're trying to teach people to be more compassionate and humanitarian while this individual is doing totally the opposite."

In an interview later, Sembrat, who has been a priest and teacher for 18 years, defended his statements.

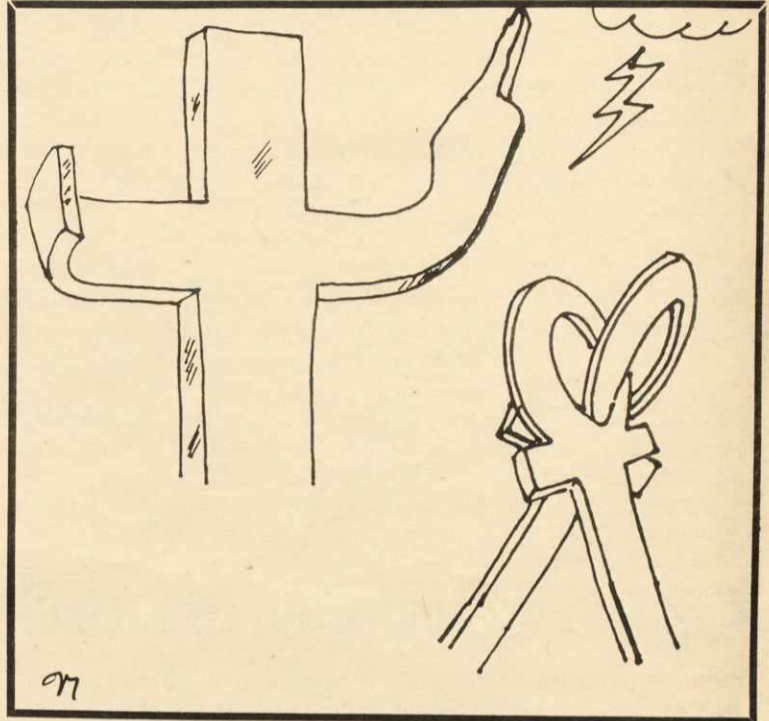
Sembrat said "lesbian-driven" referred to rituals, performed by women, which included healing after an abortion, "coming-out" rites for lesbians, a ritual for divorce, blessing for a lesbian couple and a menopause liturgy.

"Now this is witchcraft —

he was pleased with the meeting.

Kwiatkowski said he didn't agree with all of Sembrat's statements, but some valid concerns were raised.

"He came here as an individual, to speak on problems in the priesthood."



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There is no church pronouncement that individual feminists are bloodthirsty or man-hating

you're just not going to fool anybody," he said.

"The whole talk was about the priesthood and the attack on the priesthood today and I said feminism is one of these attacks and I said homosexuality was another.

"They're trying to formulate another religion. They are trying to destroy the Catholic church and give us another faith.

They want to re-write the bible — you re-write the bible and you've got another religion," Sembrat said.

The conference's organizer, Rev. Michael Kwiatkowski, said

"Saying (Sembrat's) statements express the church's position is like an MP saying something and someone thinking it's the official stance of the government," Kwiatkowski said.

"There is no church pronouncement that individual feminists are bloodthirsty or man-hating."

It included discussions on "sex education," "pro-life activism," "exposing planned parenthood," "homosexuality and AIDS," and included speakers from anti-abortion groups, REAL Women and the Church.

"Millions of human lives are lost by abortion around the globe every year. If that's not ruthless and blood-thirsty I don't know what is," Sembrat said.

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