

Saginaw: Portrait Of A Collapsing Diocese

By WILLIAM H. MARSHNER

PART II

On Aug. 21st, 1968, the Saginaw News, a secular paper, carried a lengthy attack on the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. That fact in itself was not remarkable, since newspapers all over America that Summer were pouring out a torrent of contempt for the Roman Catholic Church. What made the Saginaw publication special, rather, was the fact that the attack was endorsed and signed by eighteen priests active in the diocese. Perhaps on account of this treachery, their bishop, Stephen S. Woznicki, suffered a heart attack.

In the Nation's capital that Summer, nineteen priests did a similar thing and were promptly suspended by Patrick Cardinal O'Boyle. Many of the "Washington 19" were talented men, the sort who seemed destined for leadership roles in that archdiocese. But after the Cardinal's unexpected intervention, their careers were broken. Many abandoned the priesthood. None, to this day, has a plum parish or a post of influence.

In Saginaw, however, Bishop Woznicki was unable to take a comparable action. Because of his heart attack, he was forced to resign the diocese within a matter of weeks. He died before the end of the year. The problem of disciplining the "Saginaw 18" fell to an administrator, Bishop Hinchley, who did nothing and so bequeathed the problem to a new bishop, Francis F. Reh. What did he do?

In a word (and to put it charitably): nothing.

In the years since that historic summer, six of the dissenters have left the priesthood of their own accord. Two more are in another diocese because of boundary changes, and two others have wandered to other parts of the Country. That leaves eight — eight public detractors of Catholic teaching still active in the Diocese of Saginaw. Let us see who they are.

— Fr. Charles O'Neil, shortly after his dissent, was allowed to become president of the Priests' Senate; he is now pastor of Sacred Heart in Caro, a member of the Diocesan Liturgical Commission, and a Diocesan Examiner.

— Fr. Charles Howley has moved up to become pastor of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in Saginaw, a member of the Building Commission, and Vocations Director for the diocese.

— Fr. Joseph K. Miller has become pastor of St. Michael's in Oakley.

— Fr. Donald Christensen has moved to the top: St. Mary's Cathedral in Saginaw.

— Fr. Leonard Wilkusi has become pastor of St. Andrew's in Saginaw and a member of the Liturgical Commission.

— Fr. John O'Callaghan has moved from one plum parish to another, being pastor now at St. Mary's in Bay City.

— Fr. Edward Konieczka has moved from the sticks to the pastorship of Holy Rosary in Saginaw.

— Fr. John Gentner has struck it best of all: he is now the Diocesan

Director of Religious Education and one of the most powerful men in the diocese.

DOMINANCE OF SECULARISM

I have exhibited the advancing careers of these eight men because much more is at stake than a minor scandal involving an episcopal neglect of duty. These careers illustrate the rising dominance in Saginaw of an utterly destructive type of priest. I say this because there is much more to the *Humanae Vitae* question than appears on the surface. There is no such thing as a good, holy, and obedient priest, thoroughly imbued with the Catholic spirit, who just happens to disagree with the Pope on this one detail of moral theology. No, dissent from *Humanae Vitae* is part of a larger syndrome whose very essence is a personal alienation from the Catholic Thing. In the United States, this alienation gives rise to a Catholic Uncle Tomism which makes the "liberal" priest an ally of John D. Rockefeller III and George McGovern, that is, of two pseudo-opponents: the board rooms of American corporate wealth and the political pulpits of a post-Protestant social gospel.

Both camps are contraceptionist because they idolize a standard of living, American standards of comfort, consumption, and "self-fulfillment" are assumed to be normative — not in the sense that they are the best possible, but in the sense that their absence is considered "inhuman." Anyone who can't afford them is stigmatized as "deprived" or "underdeveloped." Closely related to this idea is the American eschatology: "our children will have it better than we did." The very thought that our children might not have it better is enough to send both the McGovern liberal and the Rockefeller conservative running to ZPG.

Contraception is part of the American public orthodoxy, not because of sexual appetite or dislike of children, but because of economics. Since the end of the '50s boom, it has become clearer and clearer to the American people that they cannot afford both the children they desire and the lifestyle they desire. Faced with that dilemma, they choose affluence over offspring or even the risk of offspring. They sacrifice the very nature of married love to what Marcuse would call the "one dimension" of consumer-man. The Church used to exercise a restraint over this tragic choice by preaching against "materialism," until the influence of Teilhard made the theme unfashionable. But individual greed has never been the whole problem. Just as crucial are ideology and economic structure.

Ideology. The notion that things are getting better, with its corollary that we have a right to live better, is held fervently as an ersatz religion. Deliberately to choose poverty and children over a "better life" is perceived as

positively indecent. The reason for this perverse attitude is the fact that affluence as such has been invested with moral qualities and socially therapeutic powers. Conversely, it is seriously believed that poverty is a corrupting state of affairs and causes social ills. This ideology becomes the hidden religion of Catholic Uncle Toms, leading them to sanction whatever will make people "happier" according to their own good-life values, especially divorce (thinly disguised as annulment), better orgasms a la SIECUS, and contraception.

DEVELOPMENT MEANS \$\$\$

Economic Structure. Because of the policies of certain managerial and financial elites, the American economy makes it very difficult for a family to choose anything but contraception, for the sake of survival. Builders and realtors can make more money on efficiency and one-bedroom apartments; hence the anti-family housing pattern in urban areas. Planned obsolescence forces a family to keep on spending, year after year, not only for automobiles but for almost every kind of machine and merchandise manufactured in this Country; hence more profits to the manufacturers. Printed circuitry, miniaturization, and other technological "improvements" have the same effect, because they permit price hikes and because they make repairs almost impossible. Where status items are concerned (luxury cars, color TVs, stereos, campers, swimming pools, gift shop bric-a-brac, etc.), a large family is a substandard consumer. A family of eight with an income of \$15,000 a year will spend the lion's share of that sum on food, inexpensive clothing, and other necessities (on all of which the profit margin is extremely low). A family of three with the same income will have money to burn on the technological and status-symbolic junk with which we clutter our lives (and on which profit margins are high). Hence the enthusiasm of American corporate executives for ZPG.

In a word, the American model of development has become an anti-life model, and its export throughout the world to "underdeveloped" countries carries the same, hideous message, thanks to the Population Council (Rockefeller), the Ford Foundation, and the AID. No American has seen this link between profiteering and contraception more clearly than that quintessential un-American, Ezra Pound:

With usury has no man a good house
Made of stone, no paradise on his church wall
With usury the stone-cutter is kept from his stone
The weaver is kept from his loom by usura . . .
Usury rusts the man and his chisel

It destroys the craftsman, destroying the craft. . . .
Usury kills the child in the womb
It breaks short the young man's courting
Usury brings age into youth; It lies between a bride and the bridegroom
Usury is against nature's increase — Canto 51

With all of this, the dissident priest, regardless of his politics, is a collaborator, a helping hand to corporate technocrats, because of his stand on contraception.

THE ALIENATED RELIGIOUS

Moreover, anti-life economic policies are able to work unhindered upon the American population because the family as a social institution is too weak to offer resistance. "Family" in our society was long ago reduced to a sentimental term and then, in the '60s, to a dirty word. One's "family" became the awful collection of narrow-minded, middle-aged relatives from whom one had to escape in order to be truly one's self. The much-discussed "generation gap" — a by-product of the mass media, but artificially exacerbated by prolonged schooling (that is, enforced exposure to peer pressure) — almost necessitates contraception, because it makes young people resent the presence of older relatives. Marriage then produces the nuclear family, the torture chamber in which women are alone with their children and housework, cut off from relatives who could share their burden, and in fact did so in all previous generations. So, contraception becomes an escape hatch from the harassing conditions which family breakdown creates. Against this backdrop, the dissident priest has nothing helpful to say, because he himself is usually a product of it.

Let me explain what I mean. In Europe, perhaps, to be a dissident priest is to be a man of theological commitments, to follow Rahner, Pannenberg, or Metz. But in America it is otherwise. To be a dissident priest (or Sister) here is to be alienated from one's parents and hence from their religion. It is to share the values and the resentments of other young people schooled in the '60s. It is to admire the young, the poor and the Black, and to resent the middle-aged, middle-class, White, flag-waving, bead-praying people who, as it happens, are the parents, the relatives, and the parishioners of almost every young priest and Sister in Saginaw.

This resentment finds expression in a variety of forms: liturgical freakishness, to annoy older Catholics and curry favor with the young; doctrinal novelties, to make sure that the "religion" of the young priest or Sister will not sound like the religion of the old fogies; refusal to condemn premarital sex, pot, and other (presumed) indulgences of teenagers, whereby the priest or Sister projects the fantasies of his or her own postponed adolescence; superficial political Leftism, whereby the poor and the Black are admired for not being bourgeois, but American capitalism is berated, in effect, for failing to make them so; and, worst of all, manipulation of helpless children through "religious education," allegedly to make them more loving or less uptight than their parents, but in fact to win the children as allies in the alienated young priest's or Sister's personal battle against the previous generation.

Needless to say, the destructive characteristics I have been describing are not universal among younger priests (thank God), nor are they unknown in priests of forty or fifty. There are a few older priests who years ago desired in secret much of what the dissidents stand for. But this type is rare. More common is the former "conservative" who has mysteriously gone wild, to the amazement of friends who knew him years ago. Such a priest was often a conservative in the worst sense: rigid, unimaginative, of limited intellect. When the changes came, he was swept off his feet, went through a painful adjustment, and now will not permit others to criticize the things with which he himself has had to make his peace. Oftentimes, he goes further and becomes the fiercest, most indiscriminate defender of the "new ways," precisely because he needs to keep convincing himself.

Psychological factors, then, both in the young dissidents and in their older allies, have intruded into a realm where Faith and theology ought to have reigned alone. This intrusion produces strange marriages of Faith with ideology, of ideology with scraps and remnants of orthodoxy, in ever complex and surprising variations which have no rational consistency but only a kind of psychological cement.

YOUNG TURK SYNDROME

Nevertheless, it is a fair generalization to say that these destructive characteristics occur

with greatest frequency and intensity in priests ordained since 1960, because the generation gap has increased exponentially since then. For this reason, it is instructive to examine the power of priests ordained since that year in the Saginaw Diocese, looking for evidence of a Young Turk syndrome.

The first few pages of the diocesan Directory, published yearly in Saginaw by the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, contain a list of officers, boards, commissions and institutions of the diocese. By checking the names of the diocesan priests who figure in some capacity in those pages against their dates of ordination, one quickly discovers an interesting pattern. Normally, one would expect to find a bell curve, the bulk of the honors and offices going to experienced pastors, men ordained between 1940 and 1959, with a smaller number still in the hands of older men (ordained in the 1930s) and a few going to younger men (ordained in the 1960s). This pattern is a sign of any smoothly functioning organization, since younger men take time to prove themselves, gain posts of responsibility in middle age, move up the ladder, and finally disappear from the chart in their sixties because of health or retirement. But in Saginaw the bell curve is nowhere in sight. Of all the diocesan priests mentioned as holding some position, fully forty-one percent were ordained after 1960. And that is not all: among those forty-one percent are the top officers of the diocese.

Fr. Adamec, the Chancellor, was ordained in 1960; Fr. Pashak, the Vice Chancellor, was ordained in 1963. Fr. Lerczak, the Officialis, the same year; Fr. Gentner, the Director of Religious Education, in 1964; Fr. Beitz, the bishop's secretary, in 1969; Fr. Sutton, chairman of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, in 1969 also, along with Fr. Meissner, the Vice Officialis. Thus a solid bloc of Young Turks around the bishop.

I asked one exceptionally well-informed man the question, "Who makes policy for this diocese?" And he replied, "Nobody knows who the policy-makers are, but on anybody's list of the ones having the inside track, you would have to put Adamec, Gentner, Heller, Wilkusi, Beitz and Sutton." Every one of these was ordained after 1960: two of them are public dissenters from *Humanae Vitae*; at least two more are private dissenters.

NEW BREED CONSIDERATIONS

On the face of things, it is obvious that normal promotional criteria, such as seniority, loyalty to the Church, and proven ability to manage a parish, have been replaced in Saginaw by ideological (new breed) considerations. In fact, one could hardly expect any other result, in view of yet another destructive characteristic of the dissident clergy: cliquishness. This cliquishness is utterly different from the traditional "club" spirit which has often been a bond of unity among diocesan priests. This, rather, is something intrinsically divisive. For, unlike the traditional club, the dissident clique resents the Roman Church's historic image and record. In a choice between Pius IX and Paul Blanshard, they would instantly choose the latter. Hating the Catholic past, they resent everything in the Catholic present which reveals too clear an identity with that past. They use Vatican II like napalm, to burn everything. Unable to read a single book in Greek or Latin, and probably unable even to say the Mass or the Office in Latin, they are largely ignorant of the intellectual tradition which made thinkers as diverse as Dawson and Maritain, Claudel and Bernanos proud to be Catholics; and like most ill-educated people, the dissidents ridicule and resent what they do not understand.

Hence a "liberal" Catholic is by nature a man surrounded by enemies of his own making: "conservative" bishops, senior pastors, traditional Sisters, pious lay people — that is, all of those who love the Church, in part at least, for the things that he despises. So, wherever he is, the alienated young priest feels the need to seek out his own kind, forming a clique with like-minded clerics and "liberated" Sisters to gossip and snicker. And, of course, to plot. All of this is bad enough when the clique is out of power (for in that case, they create a poisonously cynical underground within the diocese), but things are far worse when they are in control, as in Saginaw — for in that case there comes a persecution.

I asked one priest to tell me what the main story was that I should take away from Saginaw. He answered without hesitation, "The unhappiness and insecurity of the senior pastors." These men are now under the gun as a result of several diocesan policies, and they have no recourse or appeal. Sensible, moderate pastors control only one significant organ in the whole diocese, the Priests' Senate,

and even there they have but a paper-thin majority of eight to seven. For this reason, the Priests' Senate was the one and only diocesan body which refused to approve the "experiment" of putting First Communion ahead of First Confession. But the nonsense went through anyway, of course, at the insistence of the school apparatus. I am told that Bishop Reh's response to the moderate bent of the Senate is very simple: he rarely consults it any more, preferring to deal instead with its executive committee, a little trio of "progressives."

"Since Bishop Reh came in," one member of the Senate told me, "he has surrounded himself with commissions, bureaus, and special committees to study everything. The rest of us can't get through to him: we are treated as though we knew nothing."

POWERLESS BEFORE THE BUREAUCRACY

So, in effect, the senior pastors are powerless to affect policy. Worse than that, they are powerless even to preserve their pastorates where they have done their best to protect the Faith. Every pastor in the Saginaw Diocese who ever dared to stand up to the Young Turks, who ever refused to have a preposterous "catechism" series in his school or CCD, who ever complained about the silly projects on which funds from the Catholic Services Appeal are squandered, who ever raised his voice in protest because the diocesan bureaucracy grows continually, while many parishes haven't the money for a single secretary — every such pastor is in imminent danger of being demoted to some small, rural parish. And many have already been sent.

By what mechanism can such persecution be accomplished? Well, the mechanism was supposed to be a limited tenure policy. Let me explain.

In 1970 (or thereabouts) the priests of the diocese approved a limited tenure law, although very few understood its implications. It stated that pastors of small parishes would have to be transferred after three years, pastors of large parishes after six years (or in exceptional cases, after nine years). The thing was to go into effect on July 1st, 1974. By the early months of this year, therefore, senior pastors were on edge — and that for two reasons. First, the younger, technocratic clique was openly after their jobs, aiming in particular to control all parishes which have schools. Secondly, the instability which would be created by a rigid enforcement of tenure would paralyze the efforts of orthodox pastors to start sound programs or reform existing ones. Suppose, for example, that you are a good pastor, and you come into a small parish where Sadler or some other nonsense is being used in all the school grades or the CCD. You face an entrenched school board, parish council, and convent. In the very best of circumstances, it will take you two years to get the bad series out and to order, pay for, and implement a new series. And a year after that, having made an enemy of the diocesan education office, you will almost certainly have to leave. The Sisters, being in cahoots with the diocesan bureaucracy, know that your days are numbered and have only to drag their feet. Would you bother?

Fearing what is in store for them, the sensible pastors would dearly love to have the tenure law submitted to another vote. They argue that a good proportion of those who supported it four years ago have either left the diocese of the priesthood. At least twenty-seven Saginaw priests have abandoned their vocation in recent years, about nineteen percent of the original total or almost one priest in five. Since Dec. 1st of last year alone, six priests have left or are rumored to be leaving.

However, there are one or two extremely well-informed pastors who say that another vote on tenure is unnecessary, for a very simple reason. You see, a tenure policy requires permission from

Rome. Bishop Reh used to claim to have this permission, but no one ever saw the document itself (or indult). Now it turns out that the permission was never granted. The truth was finally admitted to the Personnel Board, which then asked Bishop Reh how he proposed to remove these pastors, when Rome had refused him. He answered, according to my informant, "There are other ways to remove pastors."

IN HOLY OBEDIENCE

Remember, I said tenure was supposed to be the mechanism. Failing that, there is a new plan. This is simplicity itself. The bishop just writes a letter, telling the man to move under the vow of obedience. Voila! The conservatives, the only priests in the diocese who seriously believe in obedience, are hoisted by their own petard!

A prominent victim was needed to inaugurate the scheme, and one was found in Msgr. Eugene A. Forbes, a Doctor of Canon Law, pastor of St. Mary's Cathedral, and Vicar General of the diocese. Msgr. Forbes was, and is, all that one could ask for in a dedicated, competent, and orthodox priest. His position at St. Mary's was a roadblock to a much-desired, Young-Turk takeover of that crucial parish. Moreover, Msgr. Forbes had kept a tight rein on the Cathedral grade school and high school, where he saw to it that sound catechisms were still in use. Therefore, he was the very first to be called in and told to move. It would have been nice, of course, if some sort of "promotion" could have been arranged, to put a pleasant face on things; but no promotion was available. So, the Monsignor was peremptorily demoted to pastor of St. George's in Saginaw, where, of course, of course, there is no school. The ceremonial title of Prothonotary Apostolic was given to him, so as to pacify him and his many friends and admirers. But the laypeople were not deceived, and neither were his fellow-priests.

Because Msgr. Forbes is Bishop Reh's Vicar General, he could hardly refuse an order given in the spirit of obedience. And following his example, one priest after another in recent months has had to make the same sacrifice, saying good-bye to the parish where he has invested, perhaps, the best years of his life, where his ministry has borne its fruit in people who care deeply about him because he has helped them. Uprooting is painful for any man, but how much more so for a good priest in this situation. He knows what is in store for the laity he has fostered in Christ, and he knows what is in store for him: constant transfers, constant loneliness among strange people in ever smaller, ever more remote parishes. I cannot express my admiration (perhaps the right word is "awe") for these unambitious priests, men who on the day of their ordination gave up everything for Christ, and who now, in the days of their victimhood, silently, obediently, give up everything again. The print of the nails is in these hands that pack meager belongings, following brutal orders from a Chancery bureaucrat: get out, bag and baggage, by Monday after next.

Let no one suppose, however, that these priests blame their bishop for what is happening to them. They know who their real enemies are. As one priest told me, "Good priests are not so much afraid of the bishop as they are of Adamec, Heller, Horton, Favara, Beitz, etc." — in other words, the palace guard of Young Turks with the handful of senior allies, like Horton and Favara, both ordained in the early 1940s, who rally to the dissident cause.

Beyond doubt the most feared enemy of the senior pastors is this Adamec — Fr. Joseph V. Adamec, S.T.L. — the Chancellor. He has no parish but resides with the bishop. Many pastors say flatly that Adamec is really running the diocese already, and their giant fear is that this man will be made Auxiliary Bishop. For in that case,

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(Continued from page 5)

they say, the destructive policies will roll on without limit.

PUT OUT TO PASTURE

Besides "tenure," another such policy is forced retirement at age seventy. Nobody denies that the bishop must have the power gracefully to remove men who are no longer able to cope. This is one of the reasons why Vatican II abolished the title of "irremovable pastor." But the relation between a bishop and his senior pastors, at least in a diocese as small as Saginaw, ought to be personal enough to obviate the need for a rigid law that is based on nothing but calendar age. Or so one would think. In clique-dominated Saginaw, however, there are already grotesque stories of fine priests being forced to move out of

their rectories immediately on their seventieth birthday, bag and baggage, or else accept being demoted to "economic administrator" for the sheer privilege of staying a few extra weeks, to put their affairs in order. This the thanks, after decades of self-sacrificial service.

Put it this way: where the priests of a diocese are genuinely colleagues, sharing a common love of yesterday's Church and today's, all priests are brothers and are treated like brothers; in Saginaw, however, where an anti-traditional clique has taken over, the older priests are objects, or rather, obstacles, subject to "management."

There is one older priest, whose identity I do not know, who has grasped perfectly the technocratic-managerial flavor of the clique's methods. He has anonymously circulated a delicious satire of the retirement program, which I should like to pass along for the enjoyment of our readers:

Memorandum To:
All Committee Chairmen
Subject:
Immediate Implementation
Of Retirement Program

"(1) As a result of the cutback in funds, consolidation, as well as politics, we must, of necessity, take steps to reduce our work force. A reduction-in-force plan has been developed which appears the most equitable under the circumstances.

"(2) Under the plan, older clergy (over forty) will be placed on early retirement; thus, permitting the retention of those who represent the future of the organization.

"(3) Therefore, a plan to phase out older personnel by the end of the current fiscal year via early retirement will be placed into effect immediately.

"The program shall be known as RAPE (Retire Aged Personnel Early).

"(4) Those who are RAPEd will be given the opportunity to seek other jobs within the organization, provided that while they are being RAPEd, they request a review of their employment status before actual retirement takes place. This phase will be called SCREW (Survey of Capabilities of Retired Early Workers).

"(5) All those who have been RAPEd and SCREWed may also apply for a final review (if still not satisfied). This will be the SHAFT study (Study by Higher Authority Following Termination).

"(6) Program policy dictates that they may be RAPEd once and SCREWed twice, but may get the SHAFT as many times as the committees deem appropriate.

"(signed)
"G. Manager, Chairman
"Committee For
"Committee Chairmen"

We usually picture managers — that is, the sort of people who are able to (a) write and (b) take seriously memoranda such as the one our anonymous author satirizes — as frightfully "straight" people, "organization men" with gray, flannel suits, very disciplined, neat, and regular in their habits. But in fact the Saginaw clique is nothing of the kind. In the first installment of this report, I presented extensive evidence that the clique members are more like anarchists, each involved in his own ego-trip, in open contempt of rubrics, canon laws and even dogmas. Have we, then, a paradox here? A case of schizophrenia?

NO DISTINCTION BETWEEN SACRED AND SECULAR

Not at all. There is in Saginaw a common root from which insubordination and regimentation both proceed. That root is the alienation I have mentioned above, whose inevitable result is a refusal to recognize the nature of the Church for what it is: unchangeable in essentials, hierarchical in structure, supernatural in principle. Insubordination is simply the attempt to defy this nature through unauthorized innovations; regimentation, on the other hand, is something worse. It is the attempt to replace the real nature with a false one, to substitute technocratic-managerial models of organization for Apostolic authority, and to disengage the human and financial resources of the Church from her supernatural mission, in order to misapply them to "fully human" causes.

This falsification of the Church's nature — through bureaucratization and secularization — is the heart of what I call Uncle Tomism. For the "human" causes which the clique admires are strangely indistinguishable from the preoccupations of the secular liberal state: equality, prosperity, and above them more intractable goals like "liberation" and "sensitization." The precious distinction between sacred and secular, natural and supernatural, is thrown to the winds, when these same secular goals, precisely because they are "human," are also said to be "Christian principles" or "Gospel demands."

We have been speaking of how good priests get "managed" by bad ones. Next week, however, we shall speak of the channel through which "management" comes home to everybody: religious education.