

Pastoral Perspective

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

Youth in the Church

[The first of a series of four articles]

SIGNS OF ALIENATION

When the Bishops of the United States gathered in regional conference this past Spring, they addressed themselves to two topics which reflected their common and foremost concerns — the weakening of Christian family life and the alienation of Catholic youth from adult society and its value system. I would like to share with you today and in the next three articles some of the reflections presented in a study paper prepared by the Most Reverend John R. McGann, Auxiliary Bishop of the Diocese of Rockville Centre.

In a recent visit to New York City, the Most Reverend Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, spoke on the question of the relationship of youth to the Church. He stated that there is a new split in Christendom which is much different from the old familiar divisions that existed between Roman Catholics and Protestants. This new division is between the old institutional structures on the one hand and experimental Christianity, such as the so-called Jesus Movements, on the other. The essence of the Archbishop's message was that the Church today must make room both for the older traditionalist believers and for the younger people of the Jesus Movements; that while the traditional believers have preserved Christian faith through the years, today they often present a Christianity which seems tired, conventional, and formal. As a result, many young people are bypassing the institutional Church and giving allegiance to God in new movements which use the name of Jesus as their standard.

I believe that these remarks of Archbishop Ramsey are most insightful. While

theologians are making progress in resolving historical and theological differences among Christian denominations, we are just beginning to realize and face up to the new gap that exists within Christian churches, that is, the distance between the Church and its youth, those in the Jesus Movements and those who have backed off from all religious affiliations.

As we acknowledge this question of relationship with youth, we must at the same time realize that youth are not all the same. There are different varieties of groupings, therefore different attitudes and orientations within the contemporary youth community. We have the high-school youth, college youth, those of college age who are not attending college but who form the working youth, college-graduate youth, and the youth of the post-college age who did not attend college. Each of these youth communities is not homogeneous even within itself. It has been further pointed out that there are greater differences of attitude and practice existing between college youth and their working counterparts than between either of these groups and their parents. There are church youth that is, those youth who are faithfully affiliated with their own congregations. We are all acquainted with such dedicated, apostolic Catholic youth, as well as with the confused, marginal, and alienated Catholic youth.

That there is an estrangement of youth from the Church was dramatically pointed out last year in the study done by Monsignor George Kelly, faculty member of Saint John's University, who polled 2,182 Catholic high school seniors on their religious practices. A similar study was done in 1967 which made a five-year comparison possible. Monsignor Kelly found out that, in 1967, 65 per cent of the senior boys and 80 per cent of the senior girls said that they attended Mass every Sunday. In 1971, 30 per cent of the boys and 38 per cent of the girls answered in a similar fashion. Marrying in the Church was considered a serious obligation in 1967 by 71 per

cent of the girls and 59 per cent of the boys surveyed. But in 1971 only about 35 per cent of both groups said they still felt that way. Similarly, about 70 per cent of the seniors polled said they felt that helping the poor and working for interracial harmony were the most important indices of good Catholic life. These activities were listed as more important than traditional practices like attending Mass on Sunday. Significantly too, almost 90 per cent of the high school seniors thought that becoming a priest or nun was among the least important indices of Catholic life. In this report Monsignor Kelly noted that, when church leaders examine the data they will see that changes in religious life styles of young Catholics have already occurred. Consistently and in very substantial proportions, contemporary Catholic youth seem to be disaffected by religious life, by parish life, even by Eucharistic life.

Another sociological study was done by Father Andrew Greeley and William McCready in 1972. These results substantiated Monsignor Kelly's study. Father Greeley and Mr. McCready summarized their findings by saying that 1) Catholic youth are not attending Mass with the traditional regularity of their parents; and 2) young Catholics do not accept the traditional moral teaching of the Church regarding sexual behavior as readily as did the generation preceding them.

These statistics and surveys reveal what we all have known and noticed for a number of years now, that our Catholic youth are becoming less visible in the visible Church. Since psychology tells us that all behavior has meaning, it is our responsibility to unravel the meaning and the message behind youth's alienation from the Church. We must try first to understand what is going on within the youth-world today and then to make suitable recommendations that will attempt to build bridges between youth and the Church, so that youth can continue to search, with a fresh certainty that beyond where we stand there is a vision of the new community of love and peace which they are seeking.

Pope Paul VI Notes 10 Years

By Laurence Mullin
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On June 21, 1973, Giovanni Battista Montini of Lombardy, Italy, completed a full ten years as Pope Paul VI.

Two events in the early part of June 1973, typify — in the opinion of some observers — the ten-year rule of Pope Paul, a rule characterized by liberal, progressive moves, side by side with moves described as rigorously conservative.

On June 14, the Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship, in accord with "A mandate of the Pope," banned the use of unauthorized "Eucharistic Prayers," and reserved to the Holy See alone the right of ultimate approval of all such liturgical formulas that enshrine the central part of the Mass.

On June 23, Pope Paul officially opened the first section of a new 65-room 20th Century Art wing at the Vatican Museum. The establishment of the gallery devoted to contemporary art, including American works, has been hailed as an historic event of major significance to the world of art.

He has taken steps toward decentralization of the Church's government and "internationalized" the Roman Curia — the Church's central administrative arm in Rome; he has implemented decrees of Vatican II that changed the language of the liturgy from Latin to vernacular tongues, and gave laymen and priests a bigger role in running the local church.

He created a Synod of Bishops that represented the first papal effort in modern times to seek consultation of the world's bishops gathered in a collegium assembly outside an ecumenical council, fostered the revision of the constitutions of virtually every religious order in the Church, and restored the ancient tradition of married deacons.

His precedent-shattering travels abroad ending a long-standing tradition that the Pope is "a prisoner of the Vatican," brought the papacy into the jet age and took it to the far corners of the earth.

He has nurtured ecumenical and interreligious relations with other Churches. By meeting in Rome with Archbishop Michael Ramsey of Canterbury, spiritual leader of the worldwide Anglican Communion, by journeying to Istanbul to embrace the late Patriarch Athenagoras I of Constantinople — the first Roman pontiff in more than 500 years to hold conversations with an Ecumenical Patriarch — Pope Paul gave the ecumenical movement a boost back in the 1960s that no one else could have given it.



Pope Paul VI greets American composer Leonard Bernstein who conducted a concert at the Vatican to mark the 10th anniversary of Pope's reign. [RNS Photo]

During his ten-year reign, Paul succeeded in bringing about a significant thaw in relations between the Vatican and East Bloc Communist countries, and inaugurated a policy of rapprochement with the world's Jewish community.

Under Paul, Vatican II in 1965 issued its historic denunciation of anti-Semitism, strongly deploring "hatred, persecution, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time or by anyone."

He created a special Vatican sub-commission for Catholic-Jewish Relations, and in January of this year received Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meier in a special 65-minute private audience.

On July 29, 1968, he issued the encyclical, "Humanae Vitae" ("Of Human Life"), reaffirming Church teaching that all methods of artificial contraception, including the "pill," were contrary to divine law.

His encyclical on "Priestly Celibacy," dated June 24, 1967, restated the traditional Latin Church doctrine and practice that call for an unmarried priesthood.

The pontiff's stand on these issues has alienated large numbers of Catholics, especially young priests, and has given rise to questions and challenges to papal authority.

But here again, Pope Paul has stood fast on the doctrine of papal infallibility, as defined by the first Vatican Council and reaffirmed by Vatican II, and has frequently expressed concern over "extreme"

progressive movements which threaten to erode dogma and authority within the Church."

While concerned with harmony and unity among Christian bodies, and with friendly relations with non-Christian religions, Pope Paul has manifested an unflagging dedication to the cause of peace among nations.

To plead, "no more war, never again war," was the simple and eloquent purpose of his visit to the U.N. headquarters in New York on Oct. 4, 1965.

Then, as events warranted, he raised his voice in fervent appeals for peace in the Congo, Nigeria, the Dominican Republic, India, Pakistan, the Middle East, Vietnam, and Northern Ireland.

Ever insistent that peace must be founded on justice, Pope Paul has made himself the mouthpiece of the voiceless millions trapped in poverty, disease, and ignorance.

In his landmark encyclical, "Populorum Progressio" (On the Development of Peoples) of March 1967, he criticized both laissez-faire capitalism and atheistic materialism for many of the world's ills.

And yet, as critics and supporters alike agree, the man who succeeded Pope John XXIII has endeavored to continue and make durable his predecessor's policy of "aggiornamento" or updating of the Church to make it truly responsive to the needs and aspirations of men everywhere in the nuclear age.