

My last ten burials/funerals with “Fr. Strangelove”...or How I stopped worrying and learned to love the (Demographic) Bomb, NOT!

By Father Timothy Sauppe, Posted on May 14, 2013

A stranger came into the sacristy after Sunday Mass. In an incriminating huff he said, “I have been away from the area for fifteen years; where are the people? And now you are tearing down the school? I went there as a kid.” I put my hands up to quiet him from further talking and I calmly said, “Let me ask you a question: How many kids did you have?” He said, “Two.” Then I said, “So did everyone else. When you only have two kids per family there is no growth.” His demeanor changed, and then he dropped his head and said, “And they aren’t even going to Mass anymore.”

I never thought I would be asking that question, but since I had to close our parish school, I’ve grown bolder and I started to ask that question more often. When I came to my parish five years ago, the school was on its proverbial “last legs.” In its last two years we did everything we could to recruit more students, but eventually I had to face the fact that after 103 years of education the school was no longer viable. In one of the pre-closure brain-storming sessions with teachers, I was asked what to do to get more students. I replied, “Well, I know what to do, but it takes seven years.” The older teachers laughed, but the others needed me to state the obvious to the oblivious, viz. we need more babies. In my January 2010 letter to my bishop asking his permission to close our school, I wrote:

Bishop, it is with a heavy heart that I request this of you. As you know, priests were not ordained to be closing grade schools, but we were ordained to be Christ in the midst of sorrow and pain, which will be happening as we come to accept both your decision and the inevitable fact that St. Mary’s Grade School is no longer viable. The efficient cause is simple...no children. The first cause is the habitual contraception and sterilization mentality of a good portion of married Catholic Christians—in short the Culture of Death. The final cause is the closure of Catholic Schools and parishes. Bishop, we need your leadership to address the contraception/abortion/sterilization mentality in as forceful a way as soon as possible.

I, and St. Mary’s, closed the school that May 2010. Now three years later, I am razing the school building. It breaks my heart every time I go into this closed school. It is only 50 years old and yes, the windows and heating are in need of replacement, but otherwise the building is in good shape. You could not build as solid a building these days. There has not been a week without someone bringing the school closure and now razing up to me and how sad it is. But the cost of insurance and the cost of heating an empty building has become too burdensome for an aging and a decreasing congregation. A part of this decrease has

happened because I have preached against the Culture of Death. I have modestly preached against contraception and sterilization, but for many of my parishioners it is too late. Most of them are done with raising more children. They have had their two kids twenty, thirty, forty years ago and some women don’t want to hear about the Culture of Death. They decide to go to other parishes where the pastor doesn’t prick their consciences. I am reminded of a diocesan official in his talk to us young pro-life, pro-family priests twenty years ago. He said, “Yes, you can preach against abortion and contraception, but remember, you have to put a roof over your churches.” Now, our diocese is closing and merging these same parishes, but you know what—they all have good roofs.

Pastors, if the demographic winter or bomb seems someone else’s problem, try this at your parish as I recently did at mine. I took the last ten burials and printed out their obituaries. At Sts. Peter and Paul Cemetery we had six men and four women with an average age of 80 years. With the ten, I counted the number of siblings for a total of 45 and divided by 10 which came to 4.5 children per family. Then I counted the ten’s children and divided by ten. The next generation had 28 kids which I divided by ten and came to 2.8 per family. I then moved on to the third generation, the grandchildren. These ten deceased had 48 grandchildren from their 28 children. When dividing these numbers, I came to a figure of 1.714 per family. The national average number of children per household is 1.91 (cf. http://www.census.gov/hhes/families/files/cps2012/tabA_VG3.xls); while the replacement level is 2.1 children per family.

A recent internet story from a demographer from the University of New Hampshire reports that new census numbers show that one out of every three counties is losing population. My diocese did a demographic study for our Catholic school system, and they reported that our county will be losing ten percent each year to 2020; it is on the poverty watch list for Illinois. While the general economy is depressed and our local economy is very depressed, we cannot blame these demographic shifts simply on a lack of business. Of course, most pastors don’t need the U.S. Census, we can see this decrease happening in our respective parishes from year to year. And of course, this is not just a Catholic phenomenon, it’s across the cultural spectrum. To be blunt, there is a current bumper-sticker that encapsulates our era; and it ties in to our school closure. A veterinarian has just bought our fuel burners from our school boilers because he is expanding his business to include pet

cremation. Why? For pet burials. And the current bumper sticker? “We love our granddogs!”

I don’t claim to have answers on how to turn around a dying parish or diocese. In fact, I am more at a loss as to what to say than ever before. To defend the Church’s teaching against contraception and sterilization is like going back to ancient Rome and warning them about the dangers of indoor lead plumbing. No matter what you would say their only response back would come in various levels of volume, “But it’s indoor plumbing!” In other words, no matter the real threat to one’s physical health from contraception and sterilization, the immediate perceived benefits outweigh the moral and physical downside. And, if there is contraceptive failure, i.e., a baby, women must have access to abortion; and if a couple is infertile, they can always create babies—in vitro. Further, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has now allowed an over the counter, non-prescription abortifacient drug, “Plan B,” to be given to those fifteen and older. Something as unique as one’s gender, maleness or femaleness, is now being treated as a flexible concept. In short, the freedom or liberty to kill the unborn or the elderly; to contracept or to sterilize one’s fertility; to have completely open and unrestricted sexual relationships are protected under the law because, “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s concept of existence, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life” (Planned Parenthood v. Casey, 1992).

Having grown up in the 60’s and 70’s with many “Don’t call me Father” Priests, I knew that the problem was a lack of orthodoxy. Twenty years ago when I was ordained, I thought that if I just preached the faith and celebrated a solemn Sunday Mass people would turn around. But, after twenty years, my experience is that a few parishioners will write letters to the Bishop, some will leave murmuring, but the standard fare is benign indifference. Instead of encountering joy and submission to the Natural Law and the Church’s teaching on human life and its dignity, I have found Catholic Christians either complacent or complicit with the Culture of Death. It was reported that over fifty percent of Catholics voted for a pro-abortion president who at a recent Texas Planned Parenthood convention asked God to bless them. If I have found any fruit, it has mostly come from home-schooling families.

I have become convinced that there is a connection, a direct correlation, between contracepting or sterilizing one’s fertility that parleys into an infertile relationship with Jesus, the Divine Bridegroom. In other words, mortal sin is the ultimate barrier method when it comes to God’s gift of grace being implanted within our souls. It is known that Jesus expects us to be faithful in small things before He will entrust us with larger issues. What is smaller and yet has the greatest value than bringing new life into the world? The realpolitik, the *sitz im leben*, the situation on the ground, is that reproductive dissent has reached and surpassed a critical mass. Whether we are talking within or outside the church, tacit support is given to the culture of death when we don’t support the Natural Law against all unnatural sexual actions.

To wit, the arrogant aggrandizement of the state and Federal government under Obamacare and the HHS mandate over Catholic hospitals and educational institutions. Where will it end? (Cardinal George of Chicago has predicted that there may be no Catholic hospitals or colleges within two years.)



Sometimes I feel like the Slim Pickens character from the 1964 movie, *Dr. Strangelove*, where he is riding the falling nuclear bomb; he, waving a cowboy hat; me waving a biretta. (If not a biretta, perhaps a sixty

degree sand-wedge.) What I should be doing instead is to try to defuse the demographic bomb; but the thing is, “God always forgives, man sometimes forgives, but nature...nature never forgives!” If the vast majority of Catholics chose to contracept and sterilize themselves into the dust bin of history, what can God do? Of course, God could cause a miracle conversion a la the Prophet Jonah and Nineveh; or, the miracle of when God ordered Ezekiel to prophecy over the dead bones that then came together as he was prophesying— however, Ezekiel at least had bones to “work” with.

What can a priest/pastor do when there is a congregation with a contraceptive/ sterilization mentality? Should he tell them to repent and have a reversal of the vasectomy or tubal ligation? If that fails, should he encourage his flock to adopt or become foster parents? Should he not be promoting Natural Family Planning which uses the best of science to help couples to be fruitful—not to mention ecological breastfeeding (cf.<http://www.NFPandmore.org>)?

Of course, he should be doing all of these remedies and more, but at the very least he should be doing what the Curé de Ars, St. John Vianney did: fast, pray, eat potatoes for his people, his sheep. Take note that the Bishops of Great Britain have returned to Friday abstinence from meat as a corporate witness to bodily discipline and penance. Priests should be personally doing at least this much. (In the U.S., few even know that the guideline is that we should offer something up on Fridays, not necessarily meat.) Could something like what happened in England happen in the U.S.?

Cardinal Burke says not to wait for a national statement. In an exclusive interview with his Eminence, Rome correspondent for LifeSiteNews.com (April 23, 2013) Hilary White reported that, “The bishops of the world must, as individuals, take the lead in combating the Culture of Death, and not wait for the national conferences.” Further, she quotes his Eminence as saying that,

“It should be emphasized that the individual bishop has a responsibility in this matter. Sometimes what happens is the individual bishops are unwilling to do anything because they wait for the national bishops’ conference to take the lead.”

Well stated your Eminence! Amen, alleluia!

Perhaps his Eminence had in mind then Bp. Sample of Marquette, MI (now the Archbishop of Portland, OR.) who wrote in 2011 against the contraceptive mentality for his diocese; or, Archbishop John Myers' September 25, 2012 Pastoral Letter entitled, "When Two Become One: Pastoral Teaching on the Definition, Purpose and Sanctity of Marriage." Or perhaps he was thinking of my bishop, Bishop Jenky, C.S.C. of Peoria, IL., who in 2012, brought in Fr. McCaffrey of Natural Family Planning Outreach for the diocese's Assemble Days for Priests. In any event, Cardinal Burke could have further observed that many priests wait until their bishops say something, but, let us not disregard the impact of a corporate witness of a common statement against a common evil. We do have the precedent of Pope Pius XI.

Recall, how in the midst of the rising evil of the National Socialist Party in Germany of the 1930's, Pope Pius XI delivered to the German flock a German Encyclical, *Mit Brennender Sorge*. Read out loud during Palm Sunday Masses on March 14, 1937, Pope Pius XI addressed and condemned the racial Nazi ideology which would later lead the German government to exterminate "undesirables" such as the Jews and Gypsies. The Pope also called upon the faithful Catholics to hold fast to their Christian Faith and to the Natural Law! He reminds all Pastors of souls that,

"The priest's first loving gift to his neighbors is to serve truth and refute error in any of its forms. Failure on this score would be not only a betrayal of God and your vocation, but also an offense against the real welfare of your people and country." (#36)

How true these words are today in the face of a runaway chain reaction expanding the Culture of Death throughout all parts of society and media. It is all of a piece against the Natural Law; from contraception, sterilization, abortion, euthanasia, to the acceptance of homosexual and heterosexual sodomy within and without a "marriage" relationship. We are indeed in need of a new *Mit Brennender Sorge* moment for our day! A Catholic moment not for one country or people, but for the universal Church at large. An encyclical letter that would be read out at all churches on the same weekend.

It has been reported that Pope Francis is going to complete the incomplete encyclical of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI on Faith; would that his second encyclical (if his Holiness is open to suggestions) be on the defense of the Natural Law—*Humanae Vitae 2.0*. I would hope that he would use Pope Benedict XVI's wonderful address on the Natural Law that he gave to the German Parliament, Bundestag in September of 2011 as a start. If I may further presume to offer that the encyclical be centered on Jesus Christ and Him Crucified and how the Natural Law can be obscured in one's heart in a variety of ways (cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II q.94, 6 art. & q. 77) viz. passion, evil persuasion, vicious custom, self-rationalization, corrupt habits, and unnatural vices (cf. Romans 1,

homosexual acts). While civil law acts as a moral guide (St. Thomas), it is not infallible, and there can, in fact, be evil laws—which Aquinas calls not laws, but "a perversion of law." Again, think of the laws under Nazi Germany then or now with many U.S. states pushing for homosexual "marriages." I would also impose or extend the impediment to Holy Orders to any man seeking to become a permanent deacon: if he has been sterilized he should not be ordained. This and other things could be done which would announce to the encroaching secular world: "Thus far and no more—not within our One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church!"

Again, I do not know how to defuse the current demographic bomb we are collectively riding. While the Church does challenge faithful Catholics to be open to life and to be fruitful in having children; something serious needs to be done. I believe Church historians will look back at this period of the post-Vatican II era and call it by some moniker—please LORD let it not be an unfortunate one. Whatever this period will be called it seems like we, as the Church, are living through a mass protest revolution; albeit perhaps unconscious, and perhaps unthinking, but we have done so, willingly. The flock is listening to a deceptive voice of a deceiving shepherd when it comes to not having many children or keeping with sexual purity.

My purpose with this article is not to throw stones, but to have an honest discussion regarding the state of the Church—"a voice in the desert." At the beginning of his pontificate Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI said, "The Church as a whole and all her Pastors, like Christ, must set out to lead people out of the desert, towards the place of life, towards friendship with the Son of God, towards the One who gives us life, and life in abundance." (Mass of Imposition of the Pallium, April 24, 2005) He repeated these words in his opening to this Year of Faith. (cf. *Porta Fidei*, Oct. 11, 2012) As shepherds and pastors of souls, priests and bishops must be willing to cast our nets in waters that may seem unsafe or unwelcoming. But if we do not go out into the deep, we may find that the shallows have all been fished out. Yes, pastors must open the Doors of Faith, but we ourselves must be willing to walk in first. If we, the shepherds, are unwilling to defend the Natural Law against the onslaught of secularism, how can we expect the flock to do so? The experience of closing and now razing a school is one I do not want to repeat. For if a bishop or a priest hates closing a school, he is really going to hate closing a parish. In the midst of this Year of Faith, let us pray to the Holy Spirit to lead us out of this desert, this demographic winter, into a new Springtime and may Our Lady, the undoer of

knots, open up our hearts to the love of God the Father and His Son, Jesus, and the love of new life in the Holy Spirit. Amen!



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