

Cardinal Edouard Gagnon, P.S.S. 1918-2007



Msgr Vincent Foy

"A faithful pastor who, with an evangelical spirit, consecrated his life in service to Christ and His Church"
—Pope Benedict XVI.

In the death of Cardinal Gagnon, a member of the Sulpicians (P.S.S.), Canada has lost one of its most illustrious churchmen. He was a holy, learned and courageous teacher and defender of Life and the Faith.

THE BASIC STATISTICS

Edouard Gagnon was born in the small Gaspé town of Port Daniel in 1918, the third of thirteen children.

His mother was part Irish, his father French Canadian, a carpenter. The family moved to Montreal in his childhood. He went from altar boy to seminarian and was ordained a Sulpician priest in 1940. He remained at the seminary a year longer to obtain his doctorate in theology.

In 1941 he was sent to study Canon Law at Laval in Quebec City and in three years obtained his doctorate. On his return to Montreal he taught moral theology and canon law for ten years at the Grand Seminary.

From 1954 to 1960 he was Seminary President at St. Boniface, Manitoba. In 1961 he was named rector of a major seminary in Colombia, South America. He was there for three years before returning to Canada, when he was elected Provincial of the Sulpicians for Canada, Japan and South America. During his time as Provincial he also acted as a *peritus* during the closing phase of Vatican Council II.

He was ordained Bishop of Saint Paul in Alberta on

March 25, 1969, and was there until his resignation in May of 1972. That year he was named rector of the Canadian College in Rome. In January of 1973, he was appointed Vice President of the newly formed Committee of the Family, and became president the following year.

In 1979 he resigned his position in Rome and for the next years travelled extensively in Canada, the U.S.,

Africa and South America promoting Family Life, and right catechesis. Everywhere he emphasised the need to uphold the encyclical *Humanae vitae* and the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*.

He was recalled to Rome by Pope John II in 1983, and on May 25 of that year named titular Archbishop and Pro-President of the new Pontifical Council for the Family.

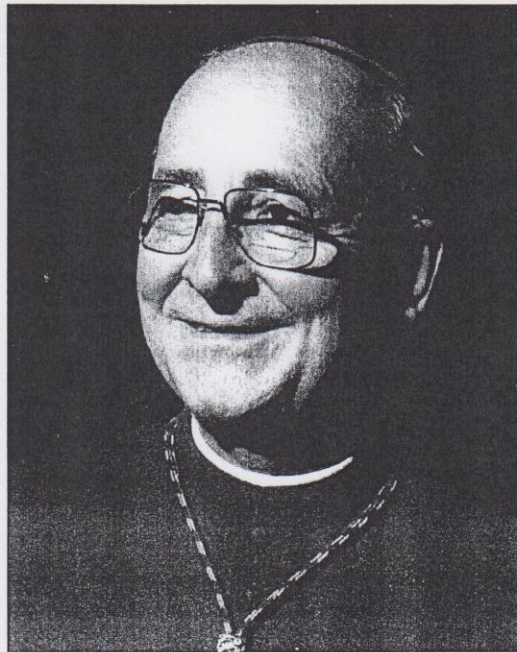
In May of 1985 he was named Cardinal Deacon and President of the Council for the Family. He resigned that office in 1990. In

1991 he was appointed President of the Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses. He also worked on some canonisa-

tion causes.

He was invested as an officer of the Order of Canada in 1993. In 1996 he was created a Cardinal priest.

He returned to Canada upon his retirement in 2001 and resided at the Sulpician



Cardinal Edouard Gagnon

Msgr. Vincent Foy is the oldest diocesan priest in the Archdiocese of Toronto. A canon lawyer by training, he has written widely on questions of catechetics and moral theology. His last book, *Birth Control: Is Canada out of step with Rome?*, 2005, pp. 128, is available from *Catholic Insight* at \$10.00 plus postage (\$2.50).

residence. When able he continued to lecture on life issues, mostly in the U.S. He died in Montreal late on Saturday August 25, 2007, or early on August 26. His funeral Mass was at Notre Dame Basilica in Montreal on Tuesday September 4.

SPECIAL MISSIONS

On a number of occasions, Cardinal Gagnon represented the Holy See at international events. In 1973 at a meeting of Catholic Universities in Salamanca, Spain; in 1974, as head of the delegation of the Holy See at an International Conference on Population in Bucharest. There he spoke on the many evils following from contraception.

He wrote numerous articles on life issues, interviewed countless delegations, arranged many audiences with the Holy Father and carried on an immense correspondence. He wrote to Catherine Bolger of Toronto thanking her for her articles in the *Messenger of the Sacred Heart* upholding the Church's teaching on life and family. In all his work his fluency in English, French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese was a considerable help. Here I would like to single out three missions of importance to the Church. In each of these, he acted as the delegate of the Holy Father.

The Pontifical Lateran University

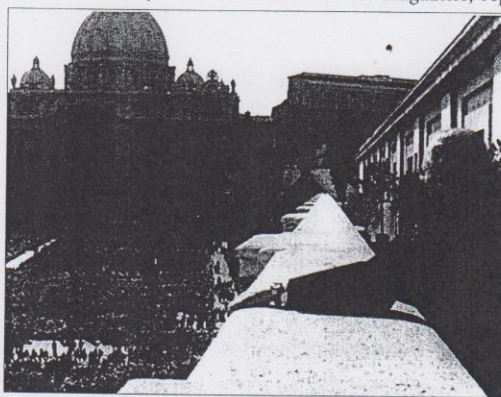
In the late nineteen seventies, Pope Paul VI entrusted to Bishop Gagnon an investigation of the teaching at the Pontifical Lateran University. There had been a public scandal when the Roman newspaper *Si Si NoNo* reported that some professors at the Lateran were Modernists, teaching the errors of Hans Kung and others. This I knew to be true. When I was living at the Canadian College in 1977, a Canadian student priest came to me greatly disturbed when a teacher at the Lateran told him he could not get his doctorate unless his thesis took into account the teaching of Hans Kung.

After numerous interviews at the Lateran and elsewhere, Bishop Gagnon presented a report with recommendations to Pope Paul VI. I do not know what happened to this report.

The Roman Curia

About 1977 the Pope asked Bishop Gagnon to conduct an investigation of the whole Roman Curia. There were widespread rumors of corruption and infiltration by enemies of the Church. These led to the often-repeated saying of the Pope that the smoke of Satan had entered the Church. This was an immense task, which took many months of intense work and many interviews.

Dr. Alice von Hildebrand, in an interview with *Latin Mass* magazine, reprinted in *Christian Order* this



Cardinal Gagnon in Rome in 1984.

year, gives this account, based on a conversation of Bishop Gagnon with an Italian priest, Don Luigi Villa of the diocese of Brescia. Bishop Gagnon "compiled a long dossier, rich in worrisome details. He requested an audience with Pope Paul in order to deliver personally the manuscript to the Pontiff. This request for a meeting was denied. The Pope sent word that the document should be placed in the offices of the Congregation for the Clergy,

specifically in a safe with a double lock. This was done, but by the very next day the safety box was broken and the manuscript mysteriously disappeared. This theft was reported even in *L'Osservatore Romano* (perhaps under pressure because it had been reported in the secular press). Cardinal Gagnon, of course, had a copy, and once again asked the Pope for a private audience. Once again his request was denied. He then decided to leave Rome and return to his homeland in Canada."

The implication was that it was because of the refusal of Pope Paul VI to see him that Bishop Gagnon returned to Canada. Perhaps it was because of his poor health that the Holy Father did not want to face up to the problems in the Curia at that time. (The Pope died in August of 1978). Bishop Gagnon told me that the Pope was under heavy medication and that explained why his speech was sometimes slurred. Actually it was because Pope John Paul II did not implement any of the recommendations of the report that Bishop Gagnon decided to leave Rome.

Bishop Gagnon wrote me on June 10, 1979, about ten months after the election of Pope John Paul II (October 1978). He said, in part, "He (the Pope) must

feel that if he started changing or contradicting the VIPs around him he would be engaged in a constant battle and would not be left enough time or strength to preach and write — all you can do for the Church is to pray and fast. We should not judge him — but I am waiting for his settling down after Poland to tell him that I am sorry for him and cannot continue working in the present set-up. I wish I were holier and could go and spend my life in a monastery, just praying. My situation will be of uneasiness. Without naming you, I had communicated to the Pope's personal secretary the new facts contained in your letter, so he knows how I feel on that too."

In a letter dated October 20, 1979, from Montreal, Bishop Gagnon informed me that he had returned from Rome. He said: "I am here since the 5th. It is probable I will not go back. I have brought along my belongings and unless the Holy Father calls me back and promises to take into account the important facts I have exposed, I'll remain here for a good period of rest and spiritual retreat and then I'll go back to teaching and preaching."

That is what he did as we have already seen. He was called back to Rome by the Holy Father, four years later, in mid-1983.

The Society of St. Pius X

As a delegate of Pope John Paul II, in 1987 the now Cardinal Gagnon tried to end the rift between Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre and Rome. To this purpose he conducted interviews with the Archbishop and others and visited institutions belonging to the new Society. At first, things seemed to be progressing favourably. Unfortunately, swayed by his advisors, the Archbishop refused the condition that he ordain only one bishop for the Society. So the mission ended in failure. Archbishop Lefebvre was excommunicated in 1988 after consecrating four bishops without permission from the Holy See.

PERSONAL MEMORIES

Although we were two years apart at the Faculty of Canon Law at Laval University in Quebec City during World War II, Father Edouard Gagnon and I took many courses together and became good friends. That friendship was shown in much kindness to me over the years.

Father Gagnon was one of four *periti* or experts present when the Canadian bishops met at Winnipeg in September of 1968 to discuss the encyclical *Humanae vitae*. Unfortunately he could only remain about two

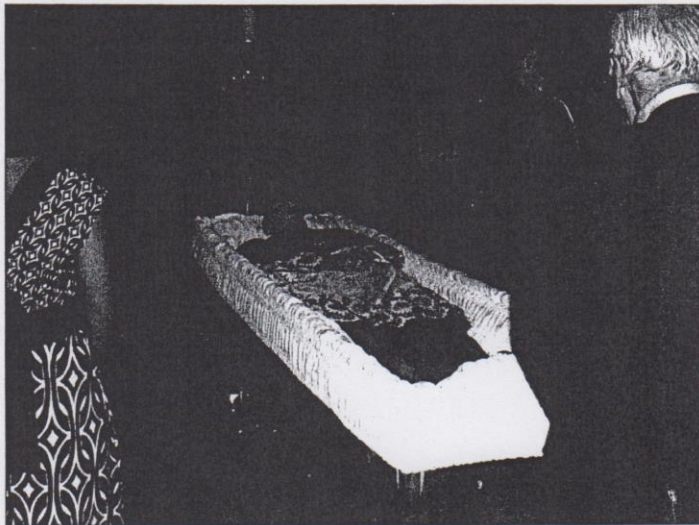
days. Bishop Francis Allen, Auxiliary Bishop of Toronto, told me that, although he considered the Winnipeg meeting a disgrace, a bright light near the beginning of the week was a talk by Fr. Gagnon asking for fidelity to the Church's teaching.

On several occasions I was a guest of Bishop Gagnon when he was Rector of the Canadian College in Rome. When I was on a mission to Rome in 1977-78, he gave me

the ample quarters of the former Vice-Rector. He referred me to many key churchmen pertinent to my mission. Once when I was called to the Vatican by Archbishop Caprio, the Substitute Secretary of State, to thank me for an article I wrote on the tenth anniversary of *Humanae vitae*, Bishop Gagnon asked me to present to the Secretary reasons why a certain churchman should not be the Vatican's representative at the United Nations. His appointment was imminent. I believe that, because of that interview, another bishop was named to the UN.

After the Canadian College was closed in the summer of 1977, to be relocated in the Fall to smaller quarters, Bishop Gagnon arranged for me to be relocated in a suite in the Casa Internazionale del Clero, where most of the priests there worked at the Vatican. Many visiting bishops and priests stayed there during their visit to Rome. The "Casa" was an excellent listening post for events at the Vatican.

Bishop, later Cardinal, Gagnon and I corresponded



The funeral of Cardinal Gagnon

over many years, mostly on life issues. He was a great support to me in my failed efforts to have the Winnipeg Statement recalled. Here is an example from a letter dated October 13, 1988: "Thank you most cordially for your letter of Sept. 13 and the transparent article on *Humanae vitae*. It will help me for a meeting of bishops which the Holy Father has convoked for November on the actuality of the Encyclical."

EPILOGUE

In my personal opinion, Cardinal Gagnon was perhaps Canada's greatest churchman. I never met anyone so completely dedicated to the Church and family issues. For many years he suffered from ill health, which he bore heroically, though he regretted that it sometimes impeded his work. He wrote to me from Pamplona, Spain on October 20, 1990: "I write this from this city where I have come for seven weeks therapy, for something they discovered during an operation I had here in September at the Opus Dei University Clinic. Pray that Our Lord help me to accept even deep suffering." In the same letter, concerning another matter, he wrote: "Obedience to the Church remains the surest means of an efficacious apostolate."


Cardinal Gagnon constantly spoke and wrote on the need to uphold *Humanae vitae*. He wrote: "*Humanae vitae* is one of the most important documents in the history of the Church. The opposition to *Humanae vitae* came mostly from 'theologians' who advanced the pretext that it was difficult for couples to observe the rules of morality in the present circumstances. But it is no more difficult than it was. We were thirteen in my home. We were born in two or three small rooms. Most of our families had more difficulties than anyone has now. Parents had more children and they were happy with the children they had."

Cardinal Gagnon looked upon the Winnipeg Statement of the Canadian bishops as a true tragedy. He considered those bishops who upheld it to be in schism.

If some of Cardinal Gagnon's missions apparently ended in failure, they were failures only in the sense that martyrs are failures. Now it is up to more bishops, priests, religious and laity to hold up the torch to Truth

about Life, which Cardinal Gagnon held up so bravely and for so long.

On Tuesday September 4, 2007, the mortal remains of Cardinal Gagnon were interred in the crypt of the Grand Seminary in Montreal. This is the institution where his mission began. In the words of Pope Benedict: "May the Lord receive him in peace and in the light of His kingdom." May he rest in peace. Ω



The G.K. Chesterton Institute
for Faith & Culture
announces the publication of the
Special Polish Issue of

The Chesterton Review

Volume XXXIII, No. 1 & 2 - Spring/Summer 2007

This handsomely illustrated issue – 425 pages – examines stereotypes of Polish anti-Semitism and is an invaluable guide for those seeking a fair and accurate understanding of Polish history and culture. "This is a matter of immense importance. These attacks on Poland are really attacks on the Catholic Church," writes Father Ian Boyd, editor, *The Chesterton Review*.


- "In Search of Polish Anti-Semitism" by Dermot Quinn
- Chesterton's Polish writings
- A review of Jan T. Gross's book, *Fear*
- An interview with Andrzej Wajda
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