

anyone with a VCR or a web connection.

I remember interviewing Ralph Ginsburg, publisher of *Avant Garde*, in 1967. I asked him flat out what his goal was. His answer sent a chill up my spine.

"My ambition," he said, "is to destroy the American superego."

Who can say he didn't succeed?

Of course, he had help from new technologies like the Pill that changed the way people thought about pregnancy and childbirth. Before, the metaphor had been a providential one: Children were seen as an unexpected gift from God.

The Pill medicalized the metaphor.

"Got a headache? Take a pill."

"Have a toothache? Go to the dentist and have it taken out."

People went from "popping a pill" to avoid pregnancy to going to the abortion clinic and "having it taken out."

Meanwhile, everything else went downhill fast. The divorce rate doubled. Thousands left the priesthood. Seminary populations declined by 90%. Tens of thousands of nuns left the religious life

To blame all of that on Vatican II is a stretch. What really happened is that the "spirit of the times" deeply affected how people viewed the decisions of Vatican II.

Another consequence of this breakdown was the growing clergy sex abuse scandal and the willingness of some bishops to look the other way.

The result included a decline in the clergy's sense of moral authority, greater reluctance to speak out, and major damage to the faith. A deep sense of faith does not coexist well with self-indulgence.

Meanwhile, the "spirit of the times" had taken a huge toll on the faithful. If the church's answer to sin is redemption, what happens after you redefine sin? It will take more than "feel good" sermons on Sun-

day to solve today's widespread religious illiteracy.

What's the solution?

Clearly what is needed is a comprehensive education and communication program aimed at today's younger generation of Catholics. And the core of it has to be the central issues of our times -- God's generous gift of life and the right to life of the unborn. The future of both the Church and the pro-life movement urgently depend on this.

Scripture cautions, "Put not your trust in princes." It is great to support good men for public office, but after 35 years of investing pro-life resources in political solutions, the pro-life movement has pitifully little to show for it.

It is time for a change.

That's why The Movement for a Better America is rallying all its skills, experience and energies behind launching such an effort in cooperation with churches and pro-life groups who wish to support a new coalition of faith.

A major effort is being undertaken to develop materials aimed at today's young parents, and through them, the younger generation on whose shoulders the future of God's people rests.

They include an expanded web page, a new online magazine called *Newlife*, meeting and discussion guides for a *First Teachers* program for parents as well as discussion guides for use by teens and youth ministers.

It will be a program built on spiritual, not on political or ideological warfare. For it to succeed, we need God's help . . . and yours!

It is time to reject "the spirit of the times" and work for the movement of the Holy Spirit in the world today. We invite you to join us.

Dennis Howard is a veteran Catholic journalist and president of the Movement for a Better America. He is available for speaking engagements in churches, schools, colleges, and youth ministries. For more information, email him at mba4life@aol.com or visit our website: <http://www.movementforabetteramerica.org>. Queries and donations for this program may be sent to: MBA, Inc., PO Box 470, Mt. Freedom, NJ 07970.

The Church Today: Growth or Decline?



By Dennis M. Howard

Sixty years ago, the late Cardinal Suhard of Paris sounded the alarm about a new post-Christian era in one of Europe's oldest Catholic countries: France.

France had been an ideological battleground for 170 years as well as center stage for two world wars. It was famous for its Catholic past, but left wing intellectuals dominated its social and political scene. Religious observance was so low that Suhard wondered whether France could survive as a Christian country.

Today a child in France can't even wear a religious medal to school, and the only people complaining are its growing Muslim population. In another 15 years, France will have a Muslim majority and someday perhaps even Sharia law.

When Suhard sounded the alarm, there was no danger that anything like this could happen in the United States. All evidence pointed in the other direction.

Hollywood was acting more like "Hollywood" with one Catholic movie after another scoring box office hits. Thomas Merton's story of his conversion and journey into the monastic life was a best seller.

Bishop Sheen competed for TV ratings with Milton Berle.

On a deeper level, things were going well, too. A genuine ferment was underway among Catholic lay people, with movements like The Catholic Worker, Friendship House, the Catholic Evidence Guild and others going strong.

Young Catholics were better informed about their faith than ever. There was much talk about the lay apostolate. A whole new breed of young lay journalists was staffing the Catholic press.

New churches were going up as fast as Bishops could build them. By the late 1950's, the Catholic Church was growing at an incredible rate of 6 to 8% a year. If that trend had continued, we would have more than twice as many Catholics in the U.S. as we have today.

Then came the Pill in 1961, and that was the end of that!

Roe v. Wade followed 12 years later. Before anyone noticed, the Baby Boom was over, and the Baby Bust had begun. Even before *Roe*, births had dropped by 1,240,000 a year.

After *Roe*, the number of abortions soared to 1,600,000 a year by the mid-1980's. It has since declined to around 1,300,000 a year, but that is still more people than we have lost in all the wars the United States has ever fought.

Indeed, abortion has taken a huge toll approaching 50,000,000 unborn children since Roe. And there is no end in sight to what has become a relentless war against the young.

In economic terms, abortion will cost us at least \$15 trillion in downstream tax revenues needed to keep our teetering federal budget in balance, and an estimated \$250 trillion in future GDP. And that does not take into account millions

of births prevented by contraception.

Meanwhile, abortion and contraception have become articles of faith in the new secular religion that has taken over the media, the court system, and much of our politics. Abortion and contraception have become as hard to challenge as Mom and Apple Pie.

Just try it -- even among presumed Catholics -- and you will quickly learn how high the wall of denial has become.

Today, only about 35% of Catholics consider themselves "pro-life." Another 20% are adamantly pro-abortion, and the remaining 45% belong to the confused middle who endorse such contradictions as "abortion is wrong, but it should still be legal."

Despite clear papal teaching against contraception, Catholic acceptance of artificial birth control is widespread, and approved alternatives like NFP (natural family planning) are weakly promoted. Ask the average Catholic couple, and most wouldn't know there is an acceptable alternative to birth control.

Meanwhile, the church itself is paying a huge price for widespread Catholic apathy about abortion and contraception. As a human institution, there is no way the church can avoid the economic and social impact our whole society is suffering -- except by unambiguously evangelizing for life.

Sadly, it is not doing so energetically enough at the national or parish level.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, for example, spends about \$3.5 billion a year on programs aimed at feeding the poor of the world, but it spends a tiny fraction of that amount -- \$2.5 million -- on educating its own people about the life issue.

That's barely 4 cents a year for everybody who calls himself Catholic.

The result is that we are paying a terrible price in moral confusion among the faithful, as well as an unprecedented loss of faith among Catholic young people, not to men-

tion a huge hit in the collection basket.

Here are our current estimated Catholic demographic losses from abortion and contraception:

<i>Losses from abortion:</i>	<i>12 million</i>
<i>Contraceptive losses:</i>	<i>14 million</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>26 million</i>

For comparison, only about a third of the nation's 65 million Catholics -- 22 million -- attend church every Sunday.

In short, we have eliminated more Catholics through abortion and contraception than now attend church on Sunday! If just half of them were in the pews, that would be \$130 million more in the basket ever Sunday.

The scandalous leakage rate reflects an even more significant loss of faith -- largely due to the sharp decline in the quality of Catholic religious education over the last 40 years.

In one Catholic community we studied, only about 20% of their Baby Boom generation still attend Mass on Sunday. Another 20% are now Evangelicals, and a similar number have found spirituality in places like AA and eastern religions.

Only God knows what happened to the remaining 40%.

So what hit us?

Some critics are fond of blaming the Second Vatican Council for much of what ailed the Catholic community in the transition from Baby Boom to Baby Bust.

A closer examination would assign responsibility, not to Vatican II, but to the changing "spirit of the times" that had begun decades earlier with Freud and Sanger, and continued after WWII with Kinsey, Hefner, Guccione and others.

By the 1980's pornography had achieved mass market status thanks to technology that made it accessible to