

Pro-Life Strategies for the 21st Century

The Cultural War (Can we still win it?)



Photograph by Dennis Howard

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By Dennis M. Howard © Copyright, 2010 *(First in a series)*

If you date it from the start of Margaret Sanger's crusade to cleanse the world of "inferior people," the "Great Cultural War" is now officially 100 years old.

The critical question we face is: Are we winning it or losing it?

By "we," I mean those who still believe in the founding principles of our great country . . . those who stand fast for life, liberty and the pursuit of genuine happiness!

And if we are losing it, what do we have to do to start winning it -- not in another 100 years, but within the lifetimes of most of us?

It is impossible to overstate the urgency of these questions. The consequences of Margaret Sanger's great crusade are severe enough to threaten the future of Western civilization. These consequences became inevitable when the Baby Boom was succeeded by the Baby Bust in the early 1960's, but their depth and severity did not begin to come clear until the mid-1990's. Even today, thanks to widespread political correctness, they still go largely unacknowledged by the leaders of our major institutions. It is a crisis that a great many leaders in the media, the churches, business and politics would rather not talk about.

However, we have reached a turning point that, without a major resurgence in traditional values, will lead inexorably to the end of the American experiment. It is time to choose or die.

Since the "Baby Bust" began with the introduction of the Pill in 1961, we have eliminated an estimated 110 million births – 53 million by the violent act of abortion. World-wide, the abortion toll approaches 1.5 billion people. Never before in history has there ever been a war against humanity on this scale. In the U.S., we have effectively cut the birth rate in half, and this has dramatically changed our growth rates in almost every sector.

The "Baby Bust" has had a devastating impact, taking us from a high growth economy to one that is now almost certainly in decline – unless things change radically.

- ***It crippled the consumer demand that drove our economy following World War II. It inflated the workforce by sending many more women to work, which contributed to a declining rate of growth in personal incomes for the first time since the Great Depression – first for men and then for women. This was compounded by wage competition driven by outsourcing and runaway free trade. As a result we are working harder for less, and have significantly less leisure than we had in 1950.***
- ***The changing demographics of the Baby Bust also caused huge shifts in the supply/demand equation in every area of social and economic life – education, business, trade, health care, manufacturing, social life, religion and government.***
- ***It also destroyed the basic trust on which every society depends for peace, order and justice. If an unborn child can't trust his mother not to abort him, what basis is there for the fundamental trust that every society needs to function?***
- ***By changing the consequences of sexual behavior, it unleashed a sexual revolution marked by a pandemic of addiction and disease. Sex, drugs and Rock 'n Roll became the mantra for a generation addicted to the brain chemistry that is the basis for all addictive behavior. Sexual addiction is on its way to becoming a universal right.***
- ***It caused grave damage to marriage and the family – the fundamental social and economic unit in society. Without healthy, thriving families, we can't have healthy, prospering communities. Instead we have had soaring rates of dysfunction that filled our jails and transformed porn and pop psychology into new growth industries.***
- ***Spiritually, the impact of the Pill has been devastating. Every serious study shows dramatic declines in religious belief and practice across all groups and cohorts from traditional Catholics and Evangelicals to today's 18 to 35-year-olds.***

Economically, demographics is destiny. Dramatically reducing the birth rate not only drastically reduced consumer demand, it also reduced investment in the next generation of workers, consumers, and taxpayers. For the first 20 years of life, children represent pure demand. They don't compete with adults until they graduate from school. We reduced that demand by cutting the birth rate in half, and compounded the problem by importing 80% of the goods we need to raise our children. That drove U.S. wages down and put U.S. producers out of business.

Lower prices brought about by unrestricted free trade come with a hidden tax. That discount you got yesterday at Walmart cost some other hard-working American his job. Multiply that by all the buying done by 120 million households, and you get an economy in a race to the bottom. Economists make the one-sided claim “that lower prices help the consumer.” They conveniently forget that almost every consumer is a producer, too.

Unrestricted free trade is not free: it amounts to a war on U.S. producers that they have no chance of winning. Without reasonable tariffs, there is no way to control its impact. A classic case is the overnight rise and fall of the U.S. residential smoke detector industry, which I helped launch as a marketing consultant to Baker Industries in 1975. In four years, Baker’s smoke detector division went from 20,000 units a year to over 1 million – a 166% rate of growth per year! Then in came the imports at half what it cost Baker to produce them.

No wonder they couldn’t compete. The imports had no engineering costs, no test facilities, no major marketing cost, no corporate overhead, no taxes! Within four years, a brand new industry was destroyed, and thousands of people lost jobs they had gotten through government-funded job training programs. What a travesty!

You can’t ignore the fact that families are the basic economic unit of society because they are the source of all future supply and demand. That’s what each new generation is all about. Unlike corporations, families can’t cut costs by saying, “Hey you, third kid from the left, you’re fired!” But when corporations fire 10,000 people at a time, they’re putting 10,000 families out of business at a stroke.

Yet, the abortion culture is saying the same thing, “Hey, kid, I can’t afford to have you, so you’re gone!” When women choose abortion, they are making both a moral and an economic decision. The most common excuses are economic. *“I can’t afford the baby. My boyfriend doesn’t want to get married. My parents won’t help me. I can’t afford to drop out of school or postpone my career.” Many are so pressured, they don’t stop to ask: “Is this the right thing to do?”*

In fact, economics is based on a delicate, changing equilibrium between supply, demand and the cost of what people need to live. The cumulative decisions of people matter. When a society supports the elimination of 110 million future workers, consumers, and taxpayers, that delicate equilibrium will be dramatically upset.

The abortion component alone – currently 53 million people and rising by 1.2 million a year – is equivalent to the population of our 69 largest cities. Four more cities are added to the list each year. The toll is already equal to 31% of our current population under age 40. It’s a major factor in long term growth because its impact reverberates through all future generations. Abort one child today, and you abort all his descendants. Civilizations stand or fall on less.

How can eliminating that many people not have a major, long term economic impact? That many future taxpayers would pay federal taxes exceeding \$13.5 trillion dollars over their working lifetimes. That equals our current national debt. If they had lived, surely that debt would be a lot more manageable. Indeed, if we had not reduced births by an additional 50 to 60 million through contraception, that debt might not even be there. Our whole economy would be 33% larger and our debt much smaller.

Unfortunately, economists and market analysts overlook the demographic connection, I was virtually alone in predicting the current economic crisis as early as 1994, even pinpointing the dates – from 2000 to 2010 and likely extending beyond that to 2020.

The big money experts like Larry Kudlow were watching Wall Street, federal reserve interest rates, government spending, taxes, corporate earnings – all of which have a bearing on economic fluctuations, but nothing like the loss of half of a whole new generation. If such a loss

had been inflicted by a foreign power, massive retaliation would have been automatic. But this was a war we had inflicted on ourselves, a war we are too ashamed to acknowledge.

Even those who object to abortion on moral grounds missed this economic aspect. When I raised the question with Dave Andrusko of National Right to Life in 1993, he told me, "Nobody makes a decision about abortion based on economics." (*Except the women who have them!*) Cardinal John O'Connor, on the other hand, recognized its significance immediately, and gave me two unforgettable interviews, which we later published as "*A Nation in Need of Healing.*"

Of course, just because something has a negative economic impact doesn't make it immoral. Human suffering, for example, is a material evil, but it can have beneficial spiritual effects. (St. Paul writes: ". . . we rejoice in our suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.")

However, anything that is intrinsically evil is highly unlikely to have a good outcome. Germany under Hitler and Nazism had to come to a bad end. Ditto for Russia under Communism. Likewise, you would be a fool to expect good to come from an intrinsic evil like the wholesale killing of the unborn. The lie that "abortion is good for women" will go down in history as one of the biggest deceptions ever told. Those who act on it often regret it later.

The moral and social impact on marriage and the family was also devastating. People were misled to think that the Pill could disconnect sex from its usual consequences without negative side effects. The initial testing of the Pill concerned itself primarily with side effects that mimicked a normal pregnancy – such as morning sickness and cramps. When they found ways to manage such symptoms, the Pill was quickly approved and released.

There was no testing of its long term effects and certainly not of any of its social consequences based on its facilitation of sexual irresponsibility. These included a doubling of the divorce rate within a decade, plus a dramatic rise in STD's, out of wedlock births, and single parent families. An epidemic of abortions among young singles also followed.

The fact is: 82% of all abortions occur to single women, and 88% occur before age 35. By removing the obvious consequences, the Pill encouraged sex outside of marriage and fostered sexual irresponsibility. In effect, it erased young women's right to say "no." They could no longer use fear of pregnancy as a reason, and the guy no longer had to worry about 21 years of child support. Abortion became the default option.

The impact of these changes was catastrophic for religious faith and practice. Every serious study of American religious life since the introduction of the Pill in 1960 shows dramatic declines in religious belief across all cohorts from pre-Vatican II Catholics and older Evangelicals to today's under-35-year-old generation. Barely 1 out of 5 Catholics in the under-35 age group attends church every week while 43% attend either "a few times a year" or "rarely or never." Half of all Catholics no longer marry within their own church. Only a fraction agree that "abortion is always wrong." These things should shake up every bishop, but apparently they don't.

None of this should be a surprise. It started right after the Pill was introduced. Over the next 10 years, seminaries emptied, thousands of priests left the ministry to get married, and vocations to the priesthood and the religious life tanked. Clergy sexual abuse of minors flourished. Celibacy apparently offered few defenses against the attitudinal changes brought about by the Pill. If sex no longer had consequences, why give it up for a life of celibacy?

Unfortunately, the Vatican and the bishops were slow to respond. For eight years after the introduction of the Pill, Catholics remained in a state of confusion. I was deeply involved in the Catholic press from 1950 to 1970. By the early '60's, rumors were rampant at Catholic Press

conventions that the Vatican would soon change its stand on contraception. While the people puzzled, Pope Paul VI appointed a commission to study the issue. When a majority of its members reportedly favored changing church doctrine, that sparked even more confusion.

Humanae Vitae finally came out in July, 1968, and went off like a bomb in a crowded church. Conservative Catholics breathed relief that long-held doctrine had not been changed, but few documents have prompted more dissent. It was fed by a whole new crew of liberal theologians like Fr. Charles Curran and Fr. Bernard Haring and newspapers like *National Catholic Reporter*. Curran was later removed from his teaching position at Catholic University, while Haring, a long-standing friend of Cardinal Ratzinger, was investigated and cleared.

Despite *Humanae Vitae*, division among Catholic clergy and laity remains widespread. Three out of four Catholic married people admit to using contraception, and it remains a hot issue in many parishes. I barely mentioned it when talking to a group of parents before a teen seminar, and faced an immediate revolt. Now I know how the Pope felt. I was even reprimanded by their pastor. Shaking his finger at me, he said sharply, "There is nothing wrong with birth control!"

Rather than risk the seminar by arguing with him, I told him that I had merely mentioned the obvious impact of the Pill on attitudes. But I couldn't help thinking, "It would have been nice if the church had told me that birth control was fine before I had my ten kids." It would have been even better if the pastor had taken a short course in *Humanae Vitae*.

I was pleased of course that he was against abortion (an estimated 1 out of 4 Catholics are not). Interestingly, *Priests for Life* posts a quote from *Humanae Vitae* on its website about abortion, but selectively omits sections of the encyclical condemning contraception. Yet the connection is clear that the Pill prepared the way for a great many people to accept abortion. It's the only default position there is for failed contraception, other than having the baby.

Because of these divisions, "hot button" issues like these are simply avoided in many churches. It is the rare pastor who preaches once a year on any of them, including the life issue. Some pastors give lip service to both – tolerating openly pro-choice Catholics among the "pillars of the parish" while allowing pro-lifers to hold their own regular meetings. However, it is unusual for the life issue to play a central role in parish evangelization and catechetical programs, where it really belongs as a core teaching. Without it, genuine conversion is impossible.

That's exactly why apathy and indifference are so widespread. When it comes to life, we are often "one, holy, Catholic, and half asleep." Few parishes make a serious effort at abstinence education and abortion prevention for those who most need it -- the 12-18 year-olds who will soon face the challenges of young adulthood, or the 18-35 year-olds who face them every day. If we fail to educate our young people, the future of the church itself is at risk.

Jesus asked, "What man among you, if his son asked for bread, would give him a stone?" Many churches simply ignore the question as they send another generation of precious children off to meet the challenges they will face in college. Yet our teen seminars prove that young people are hungry for answers. Given a chance to discuss these things honestly and openly – without prejudging anyone who expresses a pro-choice view – the response is nothing short of enthusiastic.

The change in attitudes that occur at these seminars is impressive. The "strong pro-life" segment, for example, increases by 75%, while the "mushy middle" category drops by over a third. Even the pro-choice kids thank us for giving them "a whole lot to think about." To me, that represents progress. We've given 30 seminars to over 1,000 teens. They show what can be achieved through effective programs of abortion prevention and abstinence education.

My point is that this is not a war we should be losing. Psalm 27 says, “Fret not because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away.” We pray that will be so. The cause of life is the cause of truth and justice. Yet this cultural war has gone on for a century, and at best we have a stalemate.

All we do know is that events over the next two years will determine the outcome, and we don’t dare overestimate our own strengths or underestimate the cleverness, ambition and resources of our enemies. Premature claims that America is a pro-life country based on vaguely defined polls lead only to flimsy claims of victory that will vanish in the night. They also undermine the effort to refine our own strategies and rally our resources.

Bottom line, this war is a struggle for the American people’s hearts and minds, and ultimately for victory in the ideological struggle going on between secular materialism (including communism, socialism, and unbridled capitalism), Muslim fundamentalism and the Judaeo-Christian tradition on which Western civilization was founded. Only a system based on freedom, responsibility, and human dignity is compatible with that 6,000-year-old tradition.

We are not going to win that war by simply moralizing about the rightness of our cause, no matter how correct we might be. We need to acknowledge that we are indeed living in a post-Christian civilization – not unlike the one that greeted the Apostle Paul in Athens, where he spoke to the Greeks in terms they could understand. He didn’t try to change them. Rather, he explained his Christian God in terms that fulfilled the vision reflected in their own Temple of an Unknown God – in other words, their own deepest hopes and aspirations. Rather than running him out of town, they demanded more.

What an appropriate model for our own age where God indeed, in many respects, is no longer known or understood. Willpower Christianity, based on a desire to impose the truth on others no matter what, hasn’t worked very well since before the Reformation. It has certainly served the pro-life movement poorly. The truth is not something to “shove down people’s throats.” If inner conversion is to come about, we need to be able to lead people from they are to where they ought to be, and that means talking to everyone just as Paul did.

Here are some general guidelines for the rest of this series on Pro-Life Strategies for the 21st Century, starting with the critical two-year period just ahead. They will be developed and expanded as we go along. They are intended to promote dialogue, discussion – and, yes, even debate throughout the pro-life movement. Individuals and organizations are invited to amplify and expand them, and to integrate them with their own specific strategies and programs.

They are not intended as a proprietary program of The Movement for a Better America, but as a way to stimulate effective innovation at all levels – national, international, state, down to small local and faith communities. They are meant to be “bread cast upon the waters.”

1. ***Unity and solidarity among pro-life groups are essential to success.*** However, we are a movement composed of millions of individuals and thousands of groups, each with different gifts to bring to our common purpose. We must act in concert so that others will hear a symphony, not a cacophony. .
2. ***The 80/20 Rule must apply to everything we do.*** Spending most of our resources on “talking to the choir” is a misapplication of scarce resources. We must continually reach out especially to those in the confused middle. This is especially true of groups whose mission is education. But even groups whose primary mission is lobbying must continually work to build grass roots support or their appeals will ring hollow to legislators and decision-makers.
3. ***Our greatest enemies are not the obvious ones*** like NARAL, NOW, and Planned Parenthood, but apathy and indifference in our own midst. We need new ways to wake up

those in the middle who would otherwise prefer to sit on their hands and “let George do it” when it comes to action and education at the grass roots level.

4. **Demographics is the key.** If we are serious about building future support and reducing the number of abortions, our primary effort has to be abortion prevention aimed at teens and young adults – from 12 to 18 and 18 to 35. Singles in these age groups are responsible for most first-time abortions. If we can prevent the first abortion through preventive education, there will be fewer second and third abortions. Sending young people out into today’s “sexual marketplace” without preventive education is pure dereliction.
5. **We need to review our priorities** when it comes to reaching women “at the point of sale” or waiting until they seek post-abortion healing. These are vital ministries, but focusing exclusively on them overlooks the need for prevention. Only 1 in 15,000 women have an appointment for an abortion on any given day. That means there are 14,999 others who need to be educated about the disastrous impact of abortion on women, families, and society. Ditto for those who need post-abortion healing. We feel the deepest compassion for their pain, but we must not let that divert us from countering the seductive propaganda of the abortion industry. Effective mass communications and prevention must be primary.

I recently expressed some of my concerns about where we are headed to a good friend who is a deacon. He said, “Prayer is the answer.” I told him that I pray in the morning. I pray in the evening, I pray in the middle of the night. I spend an hour each week in Adoration, and I pray in that same spirit in church on Sunday. I urge others to do the same.

However, one of God’s greatest gifts is the talent he has given us for persuasive communication and innovation. The other side has these gifts, too, and they certainly use them. If we act as if these gifts are unimportant, it’s like a man stuck up a tree in the middle of a flood ignoring the boat that God sent to rescue him. Not using our best resources is pure folly.

Jesus warned that “the children of darkness are often wiser in their day than the children of light.” That certainly seems to be true in the current cultural war. Personally, I think Jesus was encouraging His followers to smarten up. Just the way He did when He told his disciples to try the other side of boat after fishing all day without catching a thing. They finally relented and threw their nets over the other side. Their nets came up so full, they could hardly lift them.

That’s all I’m saying. It’s time to think about trying the other side of the boat.

“For want of a nail, the battle was lost.” You can help put a nail in the coffin of abortion by joining hands with us today. Your membership will help us wake up a broad cross-section of Americans via talk radio with in-depth discussion of the terrible economic and social impact of abortion. It’s happening. Please join with us today!

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