

How the Pill Explodes the Mythology of Vatican II

By Dr. Jeff Mirus | February 08, 2011 5:34 PM

I realized today something I should have realized a long time ago, something that makes it easy to explode the myth that the decline in Catholic faith and life since the 1960's is directly attributable to the Second Vatican Council. That myth can be debunked in many ways, but perhaps most tellingly with just two words: The Pill.

As artificial means of birth control became increasingly common throughout the 20th century, the development of an oral contraceptive was frantically sought by many, including Margaret Sanger in the United States. In the 1950's, a researcher working with Planned Parenthood funding was instrumental in developing a hormone-based pill to prevent conception. This was approved by the FDA in 1957 for treatment of severe menstrual disorders. Over the next two years, millions of women mysteriously developed such disorders so that they could have "the Pill" prescribed for contraceptive use. By 1960, the FDA approved the Pill for long-term use by healthy women for the sole purpose of preventing conception. The same process was going on in Europe.

The growth in popularity of the Pill was so rapid throughout the affluent, secularized West (this was true even in Catholic circles, so please, let us entertain no illusions about the pre-Vatican II Catholic laity), that it was taken up equally rapidly as a kind of cause celebre by Catholic moral theologians who had already largely slipped free of a proper Catholic understanding of the natural law. I've said again and again that Modernism had deeply affected the Catholic academy long before the Council, including the formation of priests and bishops, and that this rot emerged into the open in the 1960's only because it became culturally fashionable at that time to be frank about dissent from traditional Catholic teachings. The treatment of the contraception question is one of many examples of this phenomenon.

As I indicated a few days ago in my review of the new historical materials posted on Germain Grisez' web site detailing the battle against contraception, Pope Paul VI was aware of the challenge of widespread contraception even before the Council, when he was still a cardinal, but when he became Pope after the Council opened, he thought that the Council itself would be an unwieldy forum for addressing it. That's why he chose to have a commission study it and, ultimately, to issue an encyclical on the subject (*Humane Vitae*).

It is, I think, self-evident that the premier moral crisis of the modern West is a crisis of sexual morality, and that this crisis is particularly tied to easy, pre-meditated, long-term, effective contraception, which has so thoroughly undermined the connection between sex and reproduction. This is as true within the Catholic Church as elsewhere in society. Thus sexual issues are the number one source and motive for dissent, just as they are the number one source and motive for the general desire to secularize Catholicism and render it compatible with worldly values.

All of this began before the Second Vatican Council. All of this developed rapidly independently of the Council. The Council caused none of it; in fact the reality is quite the reverse. It was the growing secularization of the theologians and other leaders within the Church, all strongly influenced by the trends in the surrounding culture, which caused them to seize upon the work of the Council and twist it to their own purposes. This strong secular cultural agenda led directly to a deformed implementation of the Council throughout the West.

I don't mean to argue that the only factors at work were sexual, but it is inescapably true that the

problem of so-called “sexual liberation” is at the center of the crisis of Western culture and, along with it, Catholic culture in the Western world. It is important to get a basic grasp of cause and effect in these matters. So let me say once again to anyone who will listen: We must stop blaming the Second Vatican Council for the Catholic problems which have manifested themselves in the West over the past fifty years. The seeds of these immense problems were sown both elsewhere and earlier.

The Second Vatican Council did not undermine either the Church or the culture. It was rather the deteriorating culture that undermined the Church, and with it the effort to implement the renewal outlined by the Council. For the Council necessarily operated under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Western culture, while seemingly a greater and a stronger thing, sadly had no such guarantee.