

29. The Figures on the post-Vatican II decline

The figures on the post-Vatican II decline were summarized by Pat Buchanan in a Dec. 11, 2002 article called "An index of Catholicism's decline" on townhall.com. Pat Buchanan was drawing on the research of Kenneth Jones' work, *Index of Leading Catholic Indicators: The Church Since Vatican II*.

"While the number of priests in the United States more than doubled to 58,000, between 1930 and 1965, since then that number has fallen to 45,000. By 2020, there will be only 31,000 priests left, and more than half of these priests will be over 70.

-- Ordinations. In 1965, 1,575 new priests were ordained in the United States. In 2002, the number was 450. In 1965, only 1 percent of U.S. parishes were without a priest. Today, there are 3,000 priestless parishes, 15 percent of all U.S. parishes. -- Seminarians. Between 1965 and 2002, the number of seminarians dropped from 49,000 to 4,700, a decline of over 90 percent. Two-thirds of the 600 seminaries that were operating in 1965 have now closed.

-- Sisters. In 1965, there were 180,000 Catholic nuns. By 2002, that had fallen to 75,000 and the average age of a Catholic nun is today 68. In 1965, there were 104,000 teaching nuns. Today, there are 8,200, a decline of 94 percent since the end of Vatican II.

-- Religious Orders. **For religious orders in America, the end is in sight.** In 1965, 3,559 young men were studying to become Jesuit priests. In 2000, the figure was 389. With the Christian Brothers, the situation is even more dire. Their number has shrunk by two-thirds, with the number of seminarians falling 99 percent. In 1965, there were 912 seminarians in the Christian Brothers. In 2000, there were only seven. **The number of young men studying to become Franciscan and Redemptorist priests fell from 3,379 in 1965 to 84 in 2000.**

-- Catholic schools. **Almost half of all Catholic high schools in the United States have closed since 1965.** The student population has fallen from 700,000 to 386,000. Parochial schools suffered an even greater decline. Some 4,000 have disappeared, and the number of pupils attending has fallen below 2 million -- from 4.5 million. **Though the number of U.S. Catholics has risen by 20 million** since 1965, Jones' statistics show that the power of Catholic belief and devotion to the Faith are not nearly what they were.

--Catholic Marriage. **Catholic marriages have fallen in number by one-third since 1965,** while the annual number of annulments has soared from 338 in 1968 to 50,000 in 2002.

-- Attendance at Mass. A 1958 Gallup Poll reported that three in four Catholics attended church on Sundays. A recent study by the University of Notre Dame found that **only one in four now attend.** Only 10 percent of lay religious teachers now accept church teaching on contraception. Fifty-three percent believe a Catholic can have an abortion and remain a good Catholic. Sixty-five percent believe that Catholics may divorce and remarry. Seventy-seven percent believe one can be a good Catholic without going to mass on Sundays. By one *New York Times* poll, 70 percent of all Catholics in the age group 18 to 44 believe the Eucharist is merely a "symbolic reminder" of Jesus.

At the opening of Vatican II, reformers were all the rage. They were going to lead us out of our Catholic ghettos by altering the liturgy, rewriting the Bible and missals, abandoning the old traditions, making us more ecumenical, and engaging the world. And their legacy? Four decades of devastation wrought upon the church, and the final disgrace of a hierarchy that lacked the moral courage of the Boy Scouts to keep the perverts out of the seminaries, and throw them out of the rectories and schools of Holy Mother Church. Through the papacy of Pius XII, the church resisted the clamor to accommodate itself to the world and remained a moral beacon to mankind. Since Vatican II, the church has sought to meet the world halfway. Jones' statistics tell us the price of appeasement."¹

Endnotes for Section 29:

¹ <http://www.townhall.com/opinion/columns/patbuchanan/2002/12/11/165161.html>