

# The Decline and Fall of the Roman Catholic West

by **Emmet Scott** (August 2016)



Recent events have forcefully highlighted, to all but the most wilfully ignorant, that Western Civilization is – especially in Europe – in the midst of an existential crisis. The tides of humanity now pouring into Europe from the Middle East, southern Asia and northern as well as sub-Saharan Africa, will, if the process continues even for another year or so, make the continent virtually unrecognizable in a generation. North America is undergoing its own “Third World” invasion, but, since most of its immigrants derive from Latin America, the situation there is different. Latin Americans are, ultimately, not too different from North Americans culturally. The immigration to Europe, however, is coming overwhelmingly from Sunni Islam, and that makes it an entirely different ball-game. We are witnessing nothing less than the birth of the long-predicted Eurabia.

The possibility, even likelihood, that Europe would eventually cease to be "European" has been understood for at least half a century, ever since the commencement of large scale Third World immigration in the 1960s and '70s – initially into France and Britain and later into virtually all western European states. Now, whilst it is true that the ruling elites have encouraged this process for economic and ideological reasons, it is also true that a primary cause of the influx has been the massive decline in Europe's birth rate since the 1970s.

The drop in European (and American) birth rates is a complex and controversial topic and may well have more than a single cause. Nonetheless, one thing is very clear: the process has coincided almost precisely with an unprecedented and rapid abandonment of the Catholic faith amongst the Catholic populations of Europe and America, an abandonment which commenced with the implementation of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, from 1965 onwards. I'll look at those reforms presently, but for the moment wish merely to look at a few of the statistics.

Until the late 1960s the Catholic Church in Europe and the Americas was experiencing an almost unprecedented growth and expansion, a growth driven primarily by demographics, but also by conversions. In the years leading up to 1965, for example, conversions to Catholicism were running at around 150,000 per year in the United States alone. Catholic seminaries were packed and new ones were being opened every year. Demographics were also favourable: almost all regions of Catholic Europe and the Americas (North and South) had high birth rates. Indeed, during the first half of the twentieth century and even during much of the nineteenth, birth-rates among Catholics and in Catholic regions were substantially higher than among Protestants and among those who practiced no religion. Some were extremely high. Quebec, for example, with its conservative French-speaking Catholicism, had one of the highest birth-rates in the world. Catholic parts of Europe presented a similar picture: During the 1940s, '50s and '60s, for example, the birth-rate in the Catholic south of the Netherlands was almost twice that of the Protestant north. By the mid- 1960s the Netherlands was well on the way to becoming a predominantly Catholic country for the first time since the seventeenth century. And the same was true of many traditionally Protestant regions of Europe. The Catholic Church in Scotland, for example, which had been reduced to little more than a remnant by the eighteenth century,

experienced a rapid and largely demographically-driven growth during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. By the mid-1960s Catholics formed a fifth of Scotland's population, and the numbers were growing rapidly.

Until the mid- 1960s Italy was proverbially a family-orientated society. During the latter half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century the country experienced a massive population increase, and only large-scale emigration to North and South America prevented the country overtaking France and Germany in terms of population.

But the Catholic population explosion came to a rapid – almost a sudden – end in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and whilst a whole kaleidoscope of opinions regarding this have been expressed and put into print one fact is undeniable: The demographic nose-dive was accompanied by the wholesale abandonment of the faith by vast numbers of Catholics. One of the best studies to date is entitled "From Empty Pews to Empty Cradles: Fertility Decline Among European Catholics" (by Eli Berman, Laurence R. Iannaccone and Giuseppe Ragusa). The title of the article expresses the major point quite succinctly. From the late 1960s until the present the Catholic Church has experienced a mass apostasy quite unprecedented in its history. In Europe, the apostasy has generally taken the form of rejection of all religion or simple non-practice. The vast majority of Catholics in Italy and Spain, for example, whilst still "Catholic" for statistical purposes, are in fact Catholics in name only and never – or very rarely – attend church services. There has also been some leakage to various strands of evangelical Protestantism and to other faiths such as Buddhism and Islam, but the numbers are not large. In the Americas, however, the situation is quite different: Both in North America and Latin America great numbers of Catholics have converted to evangelical Protestantism since the early 1970s. So enormous has this movement been in Latin America that at least three countries, Nicaragua, Honduras and Guatemala, are now predominantly Protestant. Uruguay in South America is also now a majority non-Catholic country, though in this case most Catholics have become secularists or atheists. In 1960, 90% of Latin Americans identified themselves as Catholic: by 2013 that figure had reached 69% and was dropping rapidly. (More recent estimates put the figure at around 63% as of May 2016)

North America presents a similar picture. In spite of massive, mainly-Catholic,

Hispanic immigration, the Catholic Church in the United States is currently losing almost half a million adherents every year, some to evangelical churches, many to secularism. Altogether, 41% of those born Catholic in the United States have left the church.

If we seek to identify the cause of Catholicism's collapse in its traditional European and American heartlands we need look no further than the Second Vatican Council: For the collapse, both in terms of practice and in terms of birth-rate, began within about five years of the Council's close and the implementation of its reforms.

What then was the Second Vatican Council, and why was it so devastating?

Before examining the ideological agenda behind the reforms introduced at Vatican 2, we need to say something about what those reforms meant for Catholics in the pews. To begin with, almost overnight, the ordinary Catholic saw the sweeping away of traditions and practices that had endured centuries, or rather, one and a half millennia. The mass, the central act of Catholic worship, was transformed. Latin, the language of church liturgy since the time of Constantine and earlier, was dropped, to be replaced by the vernacular of the country. Gregorian chant and traditional church music in general was abandoned and replaced by a variety of Pentecostal-like hymns, as well as new compositions which sounded very much like junk pop music – usually played on guitars.

Church buildings did not escape the reformers' zeal. Old and venerable churches had marble and teak altars ripped out, to be replaced by stark tables in avant-garde minimalist style. In the UK and Ireland and throughout the Americas, churches up to 150 years old were demolished and replaced by what has been called the "ecclesiastical wigwam," round or semi-circular structures of barn-like emptiness which left the congregation facing each other rather than the altar.

But the Vatican 2 reformers did not stop there: The very content of Catholic teaching changed beyond recognition. Instead of personal responsibility and moral accountability, priests and bishops now spoke only of love and forgiveness. Congregations were encouraged to believe that God would forgive everything, even if forgiveness was not asked. The faithful became used to hearing priests speak of the need to "love yourself" and to reject the whole

idea of guilt. Indeed, for many Vatican 2 priests and theologians it seemed that feeling guilty was the only sin a man or woman could commit. In many parishes, sermons (now called "homilies") centered on the need to fight for social justice, and in some parts of Latin America the word "fight" was interpreted in the most literal sense possible. Everywhere, "social action" replaced the call to personal holiness, and in keeping with this world-centered outlook, the idea of the supernatural was downplayed and even denied. Thus many priests interpreted Christ's feeding of the 5,000 as not a miracle at all, but a "social miracle" in that, when the crowd saw the generosity of Jesus in distributing the five loaves and two fishes, they responded by bringing out their own (concealed) food hampers and sharing them with their neighbours.

In short, by the late 1960s the Catholic Church looked and sounded, to all intents and purposes, like a liberal Protestant congregation, barely distinguishable, in terms of doctrine, from the Lutherans or Anglicans/Episcopalians. Indeed, in some respects, Catholic bishops and clergy went even further than their liberal Protestant counterparts. All reference to the "hot button" issues of what has now become known as the Culture Wars, was studiously omitted from sermons and church circulars. The present writer, who is a practising Catholic, has not heard a word about sexual morality, abortion, pornography or homosexuality, from the pulpit in forty years. Nor has he heard the word "Hell" or even "Purgatory" mentioned in the same period. These teachings, which are about accountability and personal morality, were quietly dropped, though never officially removed from church doctrine. Thus, whilst it is commonly perceived that Catholics are conservative on all these issues, in reality rank and file Catholics, as well as Catholic clergymen, are now actually much more liberal than evangelical Protestants, and almost as liberal as atheists and agnostics. This was dramatically revealed in May 2015 when Ireland – possibly the most Catholic country in the world – became the first country to legalize gay "marriage" by popular vote. This result was widely perceived by the mainstream media as signalling a rejection to the Catholic Church by Ireland's people, but this was not the case: Ireland still has a very high rate of church attendance and remains one of the most Catholic countries in the world. In fact, Ireland's people voted for Gay Marriage because they were directed to do so by their bishops and priests. In the weeks and months before the vote, the issue was not mentioned from the pulpits except by a few priests who actually advocated a "yes" vote.

I am aware that some readers, especially those who are not Catholic, will be astonished by what I have just said. Yet these are the facts. In America too Catholics are more likely to vote for the gay and abortion-friendly Democrats than for the traditionally-minded Republicans, whilst numerous studies have found that throughout Latin America the attitude of Catholics towards the “hot-button” issues is significantly more liberal than that of their evangelical fellow countrymen.

What then was the agenda behind Vatican 2? Whole libraries of books have been written on the subject, but one thing comes across very clearly: A powerful group of senior prelates in the church, with the at least partial approval of the Roman Pontiff, moved the Catholic Church in the direction of liberal Protestantism. The schemes and conflicts of the time were outlined in 1967 by Vatican insider Ralph M. Wiltgen in a book named *The Rhine Flows into the Tiber*. The problem was that liberal Protestantism had already, by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, been thoroughly secularized and de-sacramentalized. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century many liberal Protestants had been coming under the influence of Marxist thinking and had espoused the idea of working with communists for the good of the poor (Lenin’s “useful idiots”). Many Catholic clergymen and theologians were attracted in the same direction, but such movements were vigorously resisted by the Vatican. Until 1961, that is. With the election of John XXIII the progressives now had a man on the papal throne sympathetic to their cause; and when John XXIII died another man in the same mould, Paul VI, carried the reforms through to their conclusion.

Essentially then, at Vatican 2 the Catholic Church became infected with the secularist spirit of the age, the progressivist, socialist mind-set which saw the purpose of Christianity as building heaven on earth rather than preparing the faithful for heaven after death. When the Frankfurt School of Marxist ideologues suggested a march through the institutions of the West they did not mention the church, but in the end they did not have to infiltrate the latter institution, its own theologians embraced Marxism voluntarily.

What then if Vatican 2 had not happened; if the Catholic Church had stuck to its guns in the early 1960s? What would the modern West now look like? Would, for example, the birth-rate among Catholics have declined in any case? The answer to that is almost certainly yes, but it is almost equally certain that the decline

would have been much slower than actually occurred, which would in turn have meant far fewer Third World immigrants in Europe and North America. As regards the Culture Wars, the outcome would probably have been very different. It is extremely unlikely that a combative and expanding Catholic Church would have passively observed the introduction of abortion on demand and the advent of widespread family breakdown and illegitimacy as it did in the middle to late 1970s. The sexualization of popular culture, which the media and Hollywood in particular promoted during the 1970s and '80s, would most certainly have been resisted tooth and nail by a confident Catholic hierarchy. Catholic bishops would have directed their congregations to vote for politicians who upheld traditional Christian values, rather than maintain a neutral silence as has now become normal at election time.

As it is, the future looks bleak, particularly for Europe. The Catholic Church has now effectively joined the camp of the leftist social progressives, all the more so since the start of the pontificate of Francis. Its alliance with the prevailing culture, now more open than ever, has accelerated its already rapid decline and its journey into utter irrelevance. The Europe that Vatican 2 has helped create is a Europe in its death-throes, a Europe on the brink of major intercommunal violence and war. Indeed, it now seems inevitable that we shall shortly witness social disintegration in many parts of the continent and the perpetration of atrocities unheard-of since the end of World War II.

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