On January 22 (the somber anniversary of Roe vs. Wade), the Newman Club welcomed Dan Anguis from the anti-abortion group Lifeguard join us as a guest speaker for one of our Food, Faith and Fellowship meetings. The evening began normally enough, as I recall, consisting of the typical dinner banter and socializing that Tuesday evenings always seem to provide. It was only *after* dinner that we all gradually trickled into the adjacent room and argued good-naturedly over seating arrangements. Having gone around in a circle to briefly introduce ourselves,Dan gave us a short introduction to what we were about to see, promising to tie it all up later. We then futzed with the controls of a TV and DVD player that we were all unused to using, and the movie began.

I think it would be fair to say that we were all caught entirely by surprise. The video we saw that evening was extraordinarily thought-provoking, a clear step-by-step presentation of the argument against abortion that is hard to come by in this era of rationalization and philosophization these days. In the video, the host Ray Comfort does not attempt to be confrontational, or use any hard claims of fact to convince the people he talks to; rather than begin where they could disagree, he begins his arguments by asking questions about… the Holocaust.

While he found some people who didn’t know about Hitler whatsoever and even happened upon a neo-Nazi named Steve to question, most were familiar with it enough to answer some basic questions about it concerning moral points that just about everyone can agree on the answers to: “Was Hitler good or bad?” “Was the Holocaust permissible?” and other basic appraisals of the ethics of Nazi Germany. Ray then begins asking somewhat less comfortable questions regarding what they might do in a situation where they might be called upon to kill other people, by being coerced by the Nazis. “If you were sitting in a bulldozer,” one question goes, “and ordered at gunpoint to drive forward and fill in a pit full of what you know to be still-living Jews, what would you do?” Responses varied widely, from those maintaining they would never do such a thing, to those confessing that, at gunpoint, anything goes: however, they all were in general agreement that such a thing was terrible no matter their decision, and that the act of killing another human being was of utmost revulsion.

Once they have answered that, the real discussion begins: Ray asks the unwary interviewees about their thoughts on abortion.

While there were probably more than a few pro-life responses, the video naturally focused on the lukewarm and those who were actively pro-choice in their beliefs. The video, as the title suggests, is about people who did a 180 degree flip on their views and went from indifferent or pro-abortion to decidedly pro-life over the course of their discussion, when presented with the implications of their beliefs. Ray is entirely non-confrontational with his responses to their sentiments, for the most part asking simple questions and citing the words from their own lips from earlier in the interview (the Holocaust portion) to point out the inconsistencies in their reasoning: why should an unborn baby be treated as any less of a human than the Jews the interviewee had defended only moments ago? How can anyone be allowed to deem anyone else subhuman, be it Hitler denying the humanity of those he oppressed or an American law degrading the rights of an unborn child?

It was a truly remarkable phenomenon to witness: one previously staunch advocate for abortion was swallowing tears by the end of the interview when she admitted that she had changed her mind.

In addition to making a sound case for the pro-life movement, the video can be learned from in other ways. It serves as a very good demonstration for how one can argue without antagonizing and convince without coercing. The interviewees were not in any way confronted with raw facts that they might reject utterly; rather, they were asked questions to guide their thinking, to demonstrate to them the absurdity of what they hadn’t really thought of beforehand, and the flaws in their own thinking.

At the end of the video, Ray gives another demonstration of this form of argument (formally referred to as the Socratic Seminar): everyone he talks to, even Steve (the street Nazi), is asked about their thoughts on God and particularly the afterlife. Even if they don’t believe in an afterlife, Ray presses on to ask that, assuming there was an afterlife, whether they would go to heaven or not: many of them express a believe they would (yes, even Steve.) Ray then abandons that question to ask the interviewees about the sins they’d committed over the course of their lives – how many lies, how many times they’d insulted someone, how many times they had used God’s name in vain, whether they had ever stolen anything or looked lustfully at someone (or someTHING) before. Obviously, these being regular people, their answers were incredulous – everyone lies, steals, manipulates, lusts, and all the rest of it at some point in their life. Ray proceeds to refer to their sins in a more poignant manner, as Jesus did: lust became adultery, insults became murder, and using God’s name in vain became BLASPHEMY. He turns it on them again and points out to them that, by their own admission, they are lying, stealing, murdering, blasphemous adulterers.

And then Ray has the gall to ask if they still think they would go to heaven. The results are stunning. All reply exactly the opposite of what they had breezily assumed less than 5 minutes beforehand. It’s truly a remarkable phenomenon to witness. Ray then informs them of the role of Jesus in providing a means for us to escape Hell in spite of our sins (including abortion, as he was careful to inform one woman who had already received one); and, without confronting them with it, asks them to find a Bible and think on what he had said.

After the video, we talked. While we had all obviously started out as generally pro-life, I think it’s fair to say that the video had done a pretty good job in making us think more deeply into the situation. Dan, our esteemed guest, offered an account of his own work to fight abortion, both legally and through demonstration outside abortion clinics (if “demonstration” is the word to use for sitting outside Planned Parenthood playing the guitar and singing hymns). Much was learned, even more was discussed. At the end of the evening, Dan graciously handed out complimentary DVDs of 180 to all those interested, as well as brochures detailing Lifeguard’s campaign to end abortion – worth a perusal to anyone even vaguely pro-life, just as the video can provide some of the most rewarding 30 minutes anyone can spend. All things considered, if that evening didn’t change my life completely, it certainly diverted its course a respectable number of degrees.

Feel like learning more about it? Email Dan at dananguis@lifeguardlaplata.org; he should be happy to send you a 180 DVD or more information about Lifeguard.

God bless you all.