

Lecture 4

The Second Vatican Council and American Catholicism

How has Catholicism changed from the mid-1960s to the present day?

I. Introduction

- A. Assumption by religious people: truth is eternal
 - 1. reality: things change
 - 2. how and when to change
 - a) older the religion, the bigger the problem
 - 3. language: renewal, restoration rather than change
 - a) things are not new
- B. Councils as means to “renew” and correct
 - 1. meeting of universal (**ecumenical**) church
 - 2. bringing together Catholic leaders: bishops and heads of religious orders
 - 3. named after the cities where they are held

II. “Tridentine” Catholicism

- A. **Council of Trent**, 1545-1563
 - 1. Catholicism up until changes in 1960s
 - 2. Catholic reform of the 16th century
 - 3. Response to the Protestant reformation criticism
 - a) Solidifying beliefs and rituals
 - 4. Standard Catholicism until 1960s—400 years
 - a) Importance of ritual—different from low church Protestants and from Americans in general who tend to be anti-ceremony
 - (1) Bible not stressed, not read
 - (2) Focus on sacramental life
 - (3) Continue Latin mass
 - b) Theology based on thought of 13th c. Thomas Aquinas
 - c) absolute authority of bishops and priests
 - d) isolation from other religions—*unity* of church and state
- B. *First* Vatican Council (20th ecumenical council) 1870
 - 1. Enduring through discovering and settlement of new worlds, scientific achievements, new social systems
 - 2. Conservative, reasserts the supernatural basis of faith and opposition to rationalism
 - a) Solidifies tradition of Pope speaks without error when speaks in authority (*ex cathedra*) on issues of morals and faith
 - (1) Only twice: Immaculate Conception, Assumption
 - 3. disrupted by Italian unification against papal states
 - a) papal infallibility
 - 4. condemnation of “modern” society
 - a) Syllabus of Errors, 1864

- b) Separation of church and state, reason = to religion, all religions the same

III. Changes

- A. European society—wars, revolutions, science, challenges to Catholicism not coming from religion—consumerism, feminism, socialism
 - 1. liberal Catholics pushing to make Catholicism more “modern”—less elaborate ceremonies, more engagement with the Bible, accepting of other religions
 - 2. theology more responsive
- B. Situation in United States
 - 1. Moving out of cities, becoming more educated, more “Americanized”
 - a) Modern art and architecture (abstract, simple)
 - 2. Wanting more role in church leadership, more “relevancy”, more acceptance of other religions
 - 3. At the same time strength in twentieth century
 - a) Flourishing of popular devotions, vocations, schools
 - b) Weakening of anti-Catholic bias
 - c) Catholics more powerful socially in US
- C. Gap between what people do and what is officially accepted

IV. Second Vatican Council

- A. **Pope John XXIII** initiates
 - 1. Elected in 1958, at 77, as “transitional” pope assumed would not do much
 - 2. Surprise announcement of Council
 - a) new form of spiritual renewal: *aggiornamento* ("updating")
 - (1) support of liberal forces in Europe and America
 - b) restore church’s energies for way to deal with present times, prepare for demands of modern world—“open to the world, not trying to coerce or to convert but to serve”
 - c) focus on pastoral—life of the average parish-going Catholic
 - d) render doctrines more understandable
 - 3. 1962 –1965 John XXIII and Pope Paul VI
 - a) four sessions each fall, 2500 bishops
 - b) non-Catholic observers
- B. Results of Council—series of documents
 - 1. Focus on the Mass and Eucharist
 - a) Involving people more closely to ritual life of church
 - b) In language of people (vernacular)
 - c) Regional variations more acceptable
 - d) Turning altar to face the people
 - e) Finding music people could sing
 - f) Eucharist more important than paraliturgical devotions
 - 2. New attention to the Bible
 - a) Move back to whole Scriptures, not merely what selections read at mass
 - b) Emphasis on preaching
 - 3. More equality between leaders and people

- a) Slightly more democratic both among clergy and in parish
- b) Development of parish council system in US
- c) Bishops more open to opinion of priests
- d) More lay participation in rituals: lay men and women reading epistles, distributing communion, serving as theologians
- 4. Acceptance of church-state separation
 - a) Medieval model not the only one
 - b) Religious freedom in Catholic dominated countries
 - c) Ecumenism—acceptance of other Christian communities, inter-religious dialogue, not defensive attitude
 - d) Not only openness between churches but within Catholicism
 - (1) Right of each person to listen to his or her conscious about decisions, protection of individual rights
 - (2) Kennedy as compartmentalize—church and state separated
 - (3) Tend towards privatization of religion
 - e) “Christ’s Catholic Church alone, which is the all-embracing means of salvation”—
 - (1) Others partial Catholic still whole Truth
- 5. Church can have spots and wrinkles
 - a) Images: the “pilgrim” church
 - b) “The Church, embracing sinners in her bosom, is at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, and incessantly pursues the path of penance and renewal”
 - c) Recognition of past sins, especially to the Jews
- 6. Reflections of economic status of world: poverty, capitalism
 - a) Not merely individual salvation but social reform and change
 - b) Solidarity with the poor (shift away from powerful)
 - c) Push for more involvement in politics and economics
 - d) Social mission: peace and social justice
- 7. Call to find original spirit of religious orders
 - a) Study history, values
 - b) Simple or no habits, more freedom
 - c) emphasis on thinking, not just rote behavior, re-evaluate old ideas and customs
- C. What stays same?
 - 1. Sacraments, history, celibacy, male priesthood, no divorce
 - 2. Nothing on birth control, women’s roles

V. Conclusions

- A. Importance of change of positive response to modern world
- B. Universal Church embraces American churches model of church-state relations
- C. Multiple responses in US but generally positive