

The Catholic Church in the Modern Age

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – The movement of the Catholic Church into the modern age and its loss of temporal power
2. aim – To cause us to understand the nature of the Catholic Church in our day

b. outline

1. The Loss of Temporal Power
2. The Declaration of Papal Infallibility
3. The Church into the Modern Age

c. overview

1. the **Protestant** church in the modern age
 - a. **i.e.** from the end of the Civil War into the 20th C.
 - b. the Industrial Revolution radically changing the social and economic realities of the W
 - c. the rise of Liberalism in the church, springing out of a resurgence of the Age of Reason, culminating in a new liberal understanding within the mainline churches (**i.e.** the Social Gospel)
 - d. the response of Fundamentalism in the evangelical church, attempting to counter the liberal advance through the refocusing on certain fundamentals of the faith
 1. **note:** *both* arms of the Protestant church were deeply influenced by the Second Great Awakening – liberalism by the focus on *human effort*, fundamentalism by the focus on *emotionalism* and *easy-believeism*
2. (**now**) the **Catholic** church in the modern age
 - a. **note:** we last talked about the Church of Rome during the Catholic Reformation (or the *Counter Reformation*) during the mid-16th C., specifically with the pronouncements of Trent (**300 years**)
 - b. **note:** any *fair* assessment of Church History needs to describe how the Catholic church *also* moved into the modern era – **i.e.** how did the Catholic Church come to be *what it is today*?
 1. this may be *uninteresting* to some of you (and we who are children of the Reformation left that institution behind long ago), but Rome still considers herself to be *the* Christian Church, and that organization is considered (by secularists) to *be* Christian, so we need to address it
 2. and ... I am using the terms “Catholic” and “church” loosely – certainly the Church of Rome is *not* Catholic (**i.e.** universal), and (since Trent) there is much doubt as whether it is a *church*
 - c. **note:** since the Catholic church had *few* adherents in the early U.S., most of the discussion of the Catholic Church must be centered in Europe
 1. **i.e.** most Catholicism in America *emigrated* here during the 20th C.
 2. and the *best* way to organize our discussion is around the various popes in the modern age

I. The Loss of Temporal Power

Content

a. the political realities of the church

1. the *nationalism* that began in Europe during the 14th to 16th C. has swept away the last vestiges of the Holy Roman Empire by the time we *fast forward* to the 18th C.
2. the popes, *at this point*, hold some sway over areas that are still largely Catholic (**e.g.** France, Spain, Italy), but their influence is being replaced by *popular movements* looking to capitalize on the new *democratic* forms of government being established, particularly in America
3. the *French Revolution* (1789-1799)
 - a. a period of radical political and societal upheaval in France (and Europe as a whole)
 - b. a popular movement to change the polity of France from one of an absolute monarch with feudal privileges for the aristocracy and Catholic clergy to one based on Enlightenment principles of republicanism, citizenship, and individual human rights
 - c. the pope at the outset of the Revolution was **Pius VI** (1775-1799)
 1. he had started his papacy arguing against any new social and political order, and did all he could to impede the progress of the revolution
 2. in 1798, the French army took Rome, proclaimed a republic and declared that the pope no longer held temporal authority in the city – Pius died a prisoner one (1) year later

- d. the cardinals met in Venice and elected **Pius VII** (1799-1823)
 - 1. Napoleon's rise to power in 1799 eased tensions with the new pope – he was Catholic, but not religious, and he made an agreement with Pius VII in 1801 to restore him to his See
 - 2. Pius traveled to Paris in 1804 and consecrated Napoleon as emperor – Napoleon *symbolically* “disconnected” himself from papal authority by taking the crown from Pius’ hand and placing it on his own head
 - 3. Pius VII died two years after Napoleon and was succeeded by **Leo XII** (1823-1829)
- 4. the establishment of the *nation of Italy*
 - a. following Leo XII: **Pius VIII** and **Gregory XVI** – these men *all* favored the cause of conservatism, and opposed the various republican and democratic ideas sweeping Europe, particularly in Italy
 - b. the nationalists hoped that the popes would provide the “center” around which a new unified nation on the peninsula could be formed
 - c. the longest pontificate in history: **Pius IX** (1846-1878; 32 years), the pope during the revolution of 1848, with the Republic of Rome proclaimed in 1849
 - 1. Pius IX was expelled from the city, but returned with French help – he then tried to rule as an absolute monarch, leading to the troops of the new kingdom of Italy taking the Papal States
 - 2. the result: the popes lost all temporal powers except those granted to them – *i.e.* pushing them into the control of only a few small areas, particularly **Vatican City** in Rome
- 5. so ... by c. 1850, the popes no longer held *any* temporal authority over the affairs of nations or states
 - a. the Catholic church (as an order of power) was *literally* pushed into a small corner in Rome, in contrast to the apex of its authority under Innocent II in the 13th C. over the Holy Roman Empire
 - b. and, that *continues* into the present – the pope *today* has *very little influence* over world leaders; even “Catholic” leaders (*e.g.* Biden, Pelosi) pay him little heed *politically*

II. The Declaration of Papal Infallibility

Content

a. the reaction against the loss of temporal power

- 1. in response, Pius IX insisted on reaffirming his power, even if only in *religious* matters
 - a. *i.e.* if I can't control you politically, maybe I can do so *religiously* ...
 - b. in 1854, Pius proclaimed the dogma of the **Immaculate Conception (of Mary)** – the teaching that Mary was kept pure from all taint of sin, *including original sin*, in being elected the mother of Jesus
 - 1. **dogma** = an official position of the Church that is considered an *authoritative* part of the teachings of the church down through time, *binding* on the consciences of all Catholics
 - 2. this was the *first dogma ever* defined *specifically* by a pope *and not by a council*
 - 3. in his official bull *Ineffabilis*, Pius “tested the water” to see if there would be any great “pushback” to it – none came, which set the stage for the next act to follow ...
 - 4. **note:** the Protestant response to this dogma was simply to *ignore it* because it is *illogical* and *outside of Scriptural teaching* – *i.e.* the “infinite regression” needed to make her sinless, and the utter testimony of Scripture to her *obvious* fallibility make the dogma moot

b. the declaration of papal infallibility

- 1. the **First Vatican Council**, convoked by Pius on Jun 29, 1868, and met Dec 6, 1869 – 20 Oct, 1870
 - a. at first, the purpose of the council was hidden – but, over time the purpose of declaring **papal infallibility** began to leak out as a part of a new dogmatic constitution of the church itself
 - b. in that constitution, the Council published *Pastor aeternus*, declaring:
 - 1. the primacy of Peter as the *chief apostle* amongst those established by Christ
 - 2. the continuation of the popes as the *successors* of Peter (*i.e.* papal primacy)
 - 3. the *magisterium* of the Catholic Church (*i.e.* the pope's authority over the church)
 - 4. the *infallibility* of the pope when he speaks *ex cathedra* (*i.e.* “from the chair” – from the authority granted to him as the successor of Peter and the head of the church universal)

“We teach and define that it is a dogma divinely revealed that the Roman pontiff when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is when in discharge of the office of pastor and doctor of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the universal Church, by the Divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed that his Church should be endowed in defining doctrine regarding faith or morals, and that therefore such definitions of the Roman pontiff are of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church, irrefragable.”

 - a. **note:** *ex cathedra* is limited to *specific times* when the pope speaks authoritatively – it *does not* imply that *every word* from the pope is infallible – the Council made a clear distinction because (even) they had to admit that some *previous* popes had embraced heresy
 - b. it has only been used twice – once above (which forced the issue), and once later ...
 - c. **LOW:** the First Vatican Council was an attempt by the Catholic Church to “reassert” her power

2. and the popes to follow Pius IX would continue to “flounder” in their lack of temporal power:
 - a. **Leo XIII** (1878-1903) – focused on addressing the social inequities that would rise after the Industrial Revolution, including the beginning of the Catholic *trade-union* movement
 - b. **Pius X** (1903-1914) – pushed back against the *modernist* approach to Scriptural study, resulting in modernists leaving the church, and the rank-and-file largely ignoring the pope
 - c. **Benedict XV** (1914-1922) – insisted on the right to rule the papal states, but found himself with little power to influence world events during World War I (1914-1918)
 - d. **Pius XI** (1922-1939) – struggled with the rise of Fascism, being focused on ridding the world of Communism, even making an agreement with Hitler prior to World War II (1939-1945)
 - e. **Pius XII** (1939-1958) – tried to keep a neutrality re: Nazism, being overly concerned about the rise of Communism, and failed to make significant statements re: the treatment of Jews

III. The Church into the Modern Age

Content

a. the second use of papal infallibility

1. in 1950, Pius XII declared the dogma of the ***Bodily Assumption of Mary*** – the teaching that Mary did not actually die, but was “assumed” into heaven at the end of her earthly life
 - a. the dogma is based on the earlier dogma: since Mary had no “sin nature” (**i.e.** no guilt of original sin), then she *cannot* have died – since death is the consequence of Adam’s sin, and because she did not possess the guilt of original sin, she could not have died as a result
 - b. this led to other *non-dogmatic* teachings regard Mary: a) that she did not sin during the course of her earthly life; b) that she remained a perpetual virgin after the birth of Jesus; and c) she stands as a *mediatrix* for humans before Jesus in her role as the “mother of God”
 - c. **again:** the Protestant response to this dogma was to *ignore it* because it is *ahistorical* and *inconsistent with Scripture* – **i.e.** there is no biblical or extant source as to the fate of Mary (beyond **Acts 1**) and it is preposterous to see Mary as a “mediator” between us and the true Mediator
2. however, Pius XII did pave the way for a more “modern” Catholic church
 - a. he encouraged the use of modern methods of biblical study, he began early reforms of the liturgy in the Mass, he led the way to the “internationalization” of the church by encouraging the formation of indigenous churches under the leadership of native bishops, and he brought non-Italians into the curia and College of Cardinals (**e.g.** the eventual popes John Paul II, Francis I)

b. the Second Vatican Council

1. originally called by **John XXIII** (1958-1963), it opened Oct 11, 1962 and closed under **Paul VI** (1963-1978) on Dec 8, 1965
 - a. John XIII thought the church needed “updating” to accommodate the modern age – its teachings needed to be made more “relevant” and “understandable” to the modern person
 - b. Vatican II released 16 documents: four “constitutions”, nine decrees, and three declarations
 1. **e.g.** the revision of the Mass into the common language, with the laity becoming more “involved” in the service itself (**i.e.** a front facing priest, laity as lectors, homilies, etc.)
 2. **e.g.** a new emphasis on the role of the laity in the world, under the direction of the bishops, to bring forth the gospel in every sphere of secular life
 3. **e.g.** the establishment of early forms of *ecumenism* – recognizing non-Catholics as Christians, although still outside the “true church”, with the goal of a “restoration of unity”
2. **conclusion:** the temporal power of the Catholic Church was utterly diminished through the various revolutions of republican and democratic political states, forcing the formerly great institution into a tiny enclave in Rome to rule over nothing but itself, and to attempt to “govern” the lives of its adherents strictly through “internal” measures, which had little effect upon the Protestant church in the W
 - a. **true:** there are about 1 billion Catholics worldwide, and the Vatican still holds much power over non-W followers – but (in the W), that influence has *deeply* waned, with even “good” Catholics standing at odds with the teachings of the pope on most social and cultural issues (**e.g.** abortion, birth control, etc.)
 - b. **possible:** the Church, in *abandoning* the gospel in both *substance* (Trent) and *intention*, has now been abandoned by Christ, and is nothing more than a “shell” of its former self striving to find some sort of “relevance” in the modern world