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1. Main Movements and Thought Patterns of the Churches since the French Revolution


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1. Main Movements and Thought Patterns of the Churches since the French Revolution

Abstract

Of all the churches, the Roman Catholic was most seriously threatened by the French Revolution. Characteristically, she associated herself with the traditional monarchs and supported the rule of legitimate lords, be they bishops or kings, against the rising tide of liberty, equality, and fraternity. As these liberal democratic ideas became more and more popular, the Roman Catholic church became more and more defensive. This defense made popular an old movement for complete centralization of power in the papacy, a movement called ultramontanism, which saw its fulfillment in the decisions of the Vatican Council (1869-1870). [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Contemporary Civilization, French Revolution, Religious Thought, Religious Trends, Roman Catholic Church, Ultramontanism, Pope Pius IX

Disciplines

Catholic Studies | History of Christianity | Religion

Comments

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More About Contemporary Civilization:

From 1947 through 1969, all first-year Gettysburg College students took a two-semester course called Contemporary Civilization. The course was developed at President Henry W.A. Hanson's request with the goal of "introducing the student to the backgrounds of contemporary social problems through the major concepts, ideals, hopes and motivations of western culture since the Middle Ages."

Gettysburg College professors from the history, philosophy, and religion departments developed a textbook for the course. The first edition, published in 1955, was called *An Introduction to Contemporary Civilization and Its Problems*. A second edition, retitled *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, was published in 1958 and 1960. It is this second edition that we include here. The copy we digitized is from the Gary T. Hawbaker '66 Collection and the marginalia are his.

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XXIII. THEOLOGICAL MEANING1. Main Movements and Thought Patterns
of the Churches since the French Revolution

Of all the churches, the Roman Catholic was most seriously threatened by the French Revolution. Characteristically, she associated herself with the traditional monarchs and supported the rule of legitimate lords, be they bishops or kings, against the rising tide of liberty, equality, and fraternity. As these liberal democratic ideas became more and more popular, the Roman Catholic church became more and more defensive. This defense made popular an old movement for complete centralization of power in the papacy, a movement called ultramontanism, which saw its fulfillment in the decisions of the Vatican Council (1869-1870).

Several things had prepared the church for this event, which was the first general council since that of Trent. First, the French Revolution and its aftereffects had stripped the bishops of the economic and political power which they had sometimes used to maintain an independence from papal control. Second, Pope Pius IX (1846-1878) had dabbled in liberal ideas by giving the Papal States a constitution and by freeing political prisoners, but was unable to control or lead the enthusiasm which resulted during the uprisings of 1848-1849. He was too slow in completing his promises and, when the people demanded action, he fled until French troops could restore the Papal States to him. This convinced Pius that the principle of popular rule, or even limited monarchy, was irreconcilable with the church's principle of hierarchical rule in which some were blessed with greater wisdom to govern the less wise. Third, Pius, without the advice of any council, tested his conclusions in 1854 with the bull Ineffabilis, proclaiming as dogma the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. Finally, in the Syllabus Errorum (1864), he proclaimed his rejection of naturalism, rationalism, indifferentism, latitudinarianism, socialism, communism, Biblical societies, the subservience of church to state, and concluded by denouncing as erroneous the proposition that the "Roman Pontiff can and ought to reconcile himself to, and agree with, progress, liberalism, and civilization as lately introduced."

The work of the Vatican Council was then clear-cut. It had but to persuade or to eject from the church certain minor

and Anglicans resulted in some Anglicans' joining the Roman Catholic church, in others forming a group within Anglicanism that emphasized "high-church" or "primitive church" ceremonies and episcopal power (Oxford Movement, Anglo-Catholic Movement), and in the so-called "broad-church concept" which has room within it for all kinds of emphases and variations with at least a minimum unity in the use of a common service.

Protestantism in the United States has hardly gotten over the revivalism of the frontier and the pietism of the Puritans, both of which are still evident in the Moral Rearmament movement, the campaigns of Billy Graham, and in Campus Crusades. Many of the early immigrants had left states in which there was an established church. In the United States the question was not which church would dominate, but rather how well all of them could work together in Bible societies, Missionary movements, and Sunday School unions. These are evidence rather than causes of world movements in nineteenth century Protestantism. Bible study fell or rose under the critical searchings of history, archeology, and philosophy. The conservative Protestant bodies reacted with heresy trials and Fundamentalism, a point of view which permeated many groups and which emphasized what it thought to be fundamental to Christian belief: that the Bible was without error, that Jesus was divine, that He was born of a virgin, that he died in our place to appease God's wrath, that He was resurrected bodily, and that He was to come soon bodily.

World-wide Protestant missions skirted the globe during the nineteenth century with a comprehension and an intensity unknown in the history of any previous age. The Protestant Sunday School was begun in Gloucester, England, by Robert Raikes (1735-1811) to educate working children in the three R's. It caught fire in the United States and has become one of the most distinctive features of American Protestant churches.

Protestant thought in America has only recently been enlivened and influenced by the so-called Continental trends which have inspired the most lively theological activity since the Reformation. The great names in philosophy, such as Kant and Hegel, were also great names in theology in a period which saw truth as whole and all-compassing. Enlightened ethics of humanitarianism were thought by Kant to be the Divine Imperative. Enlightened reason was defined by Hegel as man's observing the thoughtful actions of God in the world. Enlightened universalism, divorced from reason by the romantics, became to Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) the universal feeling of absolute dependence which to him was the essence of all religion and most clearly of Christianity. The dissident voices of Soren Kierkegaard and Friederich Nietzsche were scarcely heard in theology until the shattering experience of World War I.