

### **Church History, Lesson 29**

(This lesson is based primarily on The Story of Christianity by Justo Gonzalez.)

#### **What was the most important event in Catholicism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century? -- Second Vatican Council**

- Convened by Pope John on October 11, 1962.
- Ended December 8, 1965.
- 46% of the bishops were from Europe, Canada, and the U.S.  
42% were from Latin America, Asia, and black Africa. These bishops were especially concerned with poverty, speaking clearly to the non-Christian / secular world, and with speaking with a tone of compassion.
- Vatican II began allowing sermons to be preached in the language of the people instead of Latin.
- It gave latitude in the preparation of those sermons.
- It made a statement on religious freedom that affirmed the rights of individuals and groups to organize religiously according to their own principles. This ended official Catholic discrimination against other religions.
- Vatican II also reaffirmed the Council of Trent at least doctrinally.

#### **What is the defining characteristic of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century?**

- WWI – 1914 – 1918 -- 11 million military dead, 7 million civilian dead, 23 million wounded.
- WWII – 1939 – 1945 -- Over 50 million dead, 3% of world population in 1940.
- What would this do to your theology? What would this do to Christianity?
  - It certainly destroyed the optimism of the “Social Gospel”.

#### **20<sup>th</sup> Century Protestantism in Europe...**

- **Karl Barth (1886 – 1968)**
  - Trained in liberal theology, became a pastor in Switzerland.
  - Joined the Social Democratic party because he thought it was closer to ushering in a new society than a dormant church.
  - However, this optimism ran aground after WWI.
  - He decided that the best way to build a “post war” theology was to return to the text of Scripture.
  - He rejected religious subjectivism.
  - He taught what is now called “neo-orthodoxy”. He taught the otherness of God, God’s authority over us, and the “discomfort” that should bring to us.
  - He led the modern theological return to the Bible.
- **Dietrich Bonhoeffer – 1906 - 1945**
  - Churches in Germany compromised with Nazism in a wholesale manner.
  - However, some faithful pastors published the “Barmen Declaration” as a protest to the official compromises of the official churches with the state. Signers included Karl Barth and Martin Niemöller, a very popular WWI hero and well known pastor. Niemöller was immediately imprisoned and held for 8 years. However, he did survive the war.
  - This Barmen Declaration led to the establishment of the Confessing Church and Bonhoeffer led its training seminary. Most of its existence was underground.

- Bonhoeffer gave a radio address against the word “Führer” (leader / guide) being used to describe the German leader Adolf Hitler. Hitler had the address taken off the air before it was completed.
- In 1937 Bonhoeffer published The Cost of Discipleship to show how the Sermon on the Mount applies in modern society.
- In 1938 he was banished from Berlin.
- In 1939 he published Life Together which reflects on the communal life of the seminary in times of dangerous obedience.
- In 1940 the seminary was officially closed.
- He joined the Secret Service but was a “double agent” and joined a plot to assassinate Hitler. He was arrested by the Gestapo in April of 1943 and held in prison for 2 years.
- As the victorious American troops advanced, Germany eliminated those it considered its worst enemies and Bonhoeffer was hanged on April 9, 1945.
- Some of his later writings (from prison) were questionable.

## **20<sup>th</sup> Century Protestantism in the U.S....**

- What were the results of the 2 world wars in American theology?
- Who were the two most important religious figures in American Christianity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?
- **Billy Graham**
  - Billy Graham began the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association in 1950.
  - He applied some of the methodology of traditional American revivalism to the 20<sup>th</sup> century but also utilized modern technology to spread his message.
  - His campaigns were highly organized, very “local”, and televised.
- **Martin Luther King Jr.**
  - As servicemen returned from WWII black servicemen wanted to freedoms that they had fought for overseas to be applied here.
  - 1949 the armed forces were desegregated.
  - 1952 the Supreme Court ordered the desegregation of all schools.
  - Much of the early leadership of the Civil Rights movement were Christian pastors.
  - Martin Luther King Jr. started the Southern Christian Leadership Conference on January 10, 1957.
  - He led non-violent protests including sit-ins, boycotts, and marches and rallies to show the world that blacks were the moral equals of whites.
  - His letter from the Birmingham jail is a classic of non-violent protest from a Christian perspective.
  - He was leading a “poor people’s march” when he was assassinated in 1968.
- **One of the primary tragedies of post-war Christianity in the U.S....**
  - The “suburbanization” of Christianity.
  - Norman Vincent Peale and others promoted “the power of positive thinking” as a means of making Christian faith a method for obtaining inner peace and happiness.
  - This was a promotion of “faith in faith” as opposed to faith in Christ.
  - This led to a “comfortable Christianity”.