

Introduction: “Not your Father’s Catholic Church

What American Ideals shaped the foundation of our country?

Six Ages in American Catholicism Span 3 centuries.

1. The Priestless Church
2. The Church in the Democratic Republic
3. The Immigrant Church
4. The Church of Catholic Action
5. The Church of Vatican II
6. The Church in the Twenty-first Century

Key Questions:

1. Size and Structure of the Church

- How many Catholics and where did they live?
- What was the balance of race, gender, and social class within the church?
- How many priests and nuns served the laity and how did this supply affect the presence of the church in their lives?
- What were the parishes, schools and social welfare agencies that embodied the church and did its work?

2. What it meant to “be Catholic” in terms of a religious/devotional life

3. The relationship of American Catholics to the papacy

4. Public perception of Catholics

5. Catholic participation in politics

1. The Priestless Church 1600-1750

- **Size and Structure of the Church**

Very small, few and far between, no church buildings to speak of,
Very few priests, families could go months or years before seeing a
priest. 1800- just 300 Catholics in Boston

- **What it meant to “be Catholic”**
Studying catechism in the home, little opportunity to worship in a church,
Little opportunity to take sacraments – made do
- **Relationship to the papacy**
Almost none- little or no communication- irrelevant to their lives
- **Public perception of Catholics**
Very suspicious and hostile, especially Puritans who had fled abuses of church. “Anti-priest” laws, “Can’t vote unless you renounce Pope.”
- **Catholic participation in politics**
Very little- (based on population) Notable exception:
Charles Carroll of MD - only Catholic to sign the Declaration of Independence. Thomas Jefferson’s championing the 2nd amendment began to open things up

2. The Church in the Democratic Republic 1750-1850

- **Size and Structure of the Church**
More population, more priests, more churches. You might see a priest monthly or even weekly. Desire by laity to be involved- wrote a Church Constitution- who is responsible for what? Continued conflict between clergy and laity- Clergy wins.
- **What it meant to “be Catholic”**
More regular attendance when possible, but very passive. From homes to humble church buildings. Reading pamphlets about what was going on in the mass. Increased use of sacraments- especially marriage and baptism. Sacred objects bought for church.
- **Relationship to the papacy**
More renewed interest as more priests bring more news. Newly aggressive papacy in Europe, makes more of a connection to their faith: “There can be no Christianity without Catholicism, and no Catholicism without the Pope.”
- **Public perception of Catholics**
Still a lot of distrust, particularly with renewed interest in the Pope. Lyman Beecher (father of Harriet of Uncle Tom’s Cabin) particularly anti-Pope. Incited riots- result: the burning of a convent school in Charlestown.

- **Catholic participation in politics**

A continued minor role- pressing question- can you be loyal to both the Catholic Church and your country?

3. The Immigrant Church 1850-early 1900's

- **Size and Structure of the Church**

Influx of European and Irish immigrants (2.5 million in 1850) many of them Catholic swelled the church- by 1900 18 % of the population – 16 million! Increase in number of priests <500 in 1849, over 9000 by 1890. Parochial schools flourish, cathedrals build- funded by many small donations.

- **What it meant to “be Catholic”**

Church and religion central to their identity. Local ethnic parish church – still a passive experience. Communion available, but many “too unworthy.” Strict rules about fasting, lent, etc. Mary becomes important.

- **Relationship to the papacy**

Pope's expanded world role increases his role in US. Venerated, donations, indulgences for purgatory. “They may be on the bottom rung of society, but they know someone at the top.”

- **Public perception of Catholics**

Ethnic groups have a desire to be Americans – fight in wars, serve in hospitals, work in labor movement. Public still not totally welcoming – how much is “Catholic” and how much is “ethnic.”

- **Catholic participation in politics**

Ethnic factions vote in “one of their own.” Catholics are mayors in Boston, New York, Chicago, Kansas City, and Omaha. Al Smith humiliated in 1928 election.

4. The Church of Catholic Action First half of 20th century

- **Size and Structure of the Church**

16 % of population Catholic

- **What it meant to “be Catholic”**

Church attendance and partaking of sacraments. Local parish in involvement in a variety of “Societies” to build community and serve a cause (Holy Name, St. Vincent DePaul, CYO.) Catholic Higher Education. Prayer to saints for personal needs

- **Relationship to the papacy**
Tightening of the bond between Pope and people. 1931 worldwide radio broadcast by Pope Pius XI. Increased economic status allows American Catholics to visit Rome – papal tourism booms!
- **Public perception of Catholics**
Generally positive- helped by Hollywood- Spencer Tracey **Boys Town**, and Bing Crosby **Going my Way** and by Bishop Fulton Sheen- first on the radio and then on TV. Suburbanization muted differences- focus is now on the American Way of Life.
- **Catholic participation in politics**
Sen. Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin
John F. Kennedy “I am not the Catholic candidate for President. I am the Democratic Party’s candidate for president who happens also to be a Catholic. I do not speak for the Church on public matters, and the Church does not speak for me.”

5. The Church of Vatican 2 Second half of 20th Century

- **Size and Structure of the Church**
A total “reworking” of the mass: more participatory, less passive
In native language, Alter rail gone- people walk up for communion, Priest faces congregation, lay readers. After high point of Vatican 2, number of priest radically decreasing
- **What it meant to “be Catholic”**
Weekly attendance at mass, participating in services, Bible study, Cursillo weekends, Marriage Encounter, Charismatic Catholics. 1958 74 % or Catholics attend mass regularly. Rosary, Stations of the Cross: de-emphasized. Communion takers increased, Confession decreased.
- **The relationship of American Catholics to the papacy**
Enthusiastic (Yankee Stadium 1965, World Youth Day in Denver 1993) and also ambivalent. “I like the Pope, I just don’t agree with all his rules.”
- **Public perception of Catholics**
Positive- Protestants and Catholics cooperate on a number of moral issues: right to life, world hunger, civil rights. Billy Graham invites Catholic participation at Crusades
- **Catholic participation in politics**
Continued participation- “Catholicism” almost a non-issue

6. The Twenty-First Century Church Now! ☺
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- **Size and Structure of the Church**

Declining attendance except in ethnic churches. A small Traditionalist group trying to go back to the way things were: Latin, Cassocks, etc.

- **What it means to “be Catholic”**

More of a personal judgment- church attendance, agreement with church edicts-a matter for each person. .

- **The relationship of American Catholics to the papacy -**

“Complicated”

- **Public perception of Catholics**

Neutral, until Sex Scandals- now Catholics are negative on the church.

- **Catholic participation in politics**

A non-issue- 2006 27% of House - 22% of the Senate- Catholic.

Broader questions about the interface between one’s faith and one’s public political service. If a Catholic can be President, can a Mormon?