

Theology 519 – Spring Term, 2012 – Tuesdays, 3:00-5:30 -- Carney 202
The Crisis of Confidence in the Catholic Church
Raymond G. Helmick, S.J., with Jerome Maryon

Office Hours: You will find me more often at St. Mary's Hall than in my office, room 312V in the new Campanella Way building . I will regularly be there mornings from 9:00 to 12:00 any class day. You are always welcome other times as well, whenever you find me.

You can check with me by phone, **552-8215**, which rings both in the office and in my room at St. Mary's Hall. When you don't find me there, you will often find me at **617-325-1300** (St. Theresa's Rectory in West Roxbury), and we can set a time for an appointment. Always, please, leave me a number to get back to you.

Course Description:

Catholics in our time have a feeling that their Church is in trouble. The high hopes with which we came out of the Second Vatican Council have dimmed. Recruitment to the priesthood and religious life has fallen off drastically over the last forty years, to the point that staffing of parishes is in doubt. The ecumenical strivings of the Council years have become far more distant, inter-religious interests the province of a very few. Rocked by series of scandals in the Church, Catholics have become unhappy with each other, some totally engrossed in a limited set of social issues (abortion, same-sex unions, end-of-life concerns), others impatient at the ruling hand. Relations among Catholics have taken an acrimonious tone, and the extent to which faith, rather than power relations, figures in our responses to one another is hard to discern.

The Catholic Church has had its ups and downs before. To see where we are and what we need, we do well to study how we got to our current condition, from the rather static manner of the Church after the Second World War to the rejuvenation in the 1960s, with the Second Vatican Council; the resistance to change, especially from a some parts of the hierarchy, the damage done to Church authority when the 1969 birth-control encyclical was met with so much doubt, polarization with other Christian churches over the social issues and the massive impact of the sex abuse revelations of recent years. Positions on this appear to divide between defensive denial and punitive anger. Such matters seem to have distracted many in the Church from issues of war and peace, from concerns with human dignity and with the protection of our earth environment.

We expect our Church to bring, from the riches of faith that it exists to promote, genuine help in these circumstances, and that is largely the province of theologians. They are rather an endangered group in the angry cross-currents of fresh thinking and conformity in our discourse. We will need in consequence to look closely into the task of theologians and the priorities of faith that we expect them to follow. We look for the expression of Christian love as well, to characterize our dealings with one another and with the rest of the world, including those of other Christian persuasions and of other faiths or none. In a world of great diversity, in which people of different basic orientations are no longer separate in place but are in constant contact with one another, we come to realize that we will never live in peace unless we learn to respect and accommodate one another. That does not much look like the way we live now.

Requirements:

Rather than a mid-term exam I will require a **critical review of a pertinent book**, due by February 21st; also a **term paper** (2,000 words approx.) and a **final exam** (in class). The paper will count for 40% of the grade, the book review and the final exam each 30%.

I will also post a question on the Blackboard Vista after each class, and will look for each student to post a one-page response to it, to which I can then post a reply. I've been finding that this promotes a very active discussion within the class, and works better if not encumbered by any fears that you could be hurt by what you write.

Required Books:

Raymond G. Helmick, S.J., *Living Catholic Faith in a Contentious Age*. London, Continuum, 2010.

Mark Massa, S.J., *The American Catholic Revolution: How the '60s Changed the Church Forever*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

John W. O'Malley, S.J., *What Happened at Vatican II?* Harvard University Press

I will also enforce an attendance requirement. Unexcused absences will be reflected in the grade, and any consistent pattern of non-attendance will be reason to require that you drop the course.

Class Calendar:

Tues., Jan. 17 Assuming there is a crisis, what is its nature, and how serious is it? Does it stem simply from the widely publicized sex-abuse scandal, or does it have other causes, and if so what are they? Does the publicity about it reflect an attack on the Church by enemies, or is it mainly disappointment and shock within the Church?

A paper on this will have been posted on the Blackboard Vista before this class, for you to agree with or disagree, but we should discuss it from your own perceptions.

Tues., Jan. 24 **Comparison with other crises.** The Reformation. The 11th-century division between East and West. How good was the response in those cases? Is the present response better or worse? Are these the right comparisons?

Historical conspectus of major change in the Church. A paper of mine will be posted on the Blackboard Vista.

- Tues., Jan. 31 **The monolith Church as it emerged from the French Revolution.** Church understanding itself as struggling for survival in a world of enemies. Was this an appropriate concept then? It is appropriate now?
- Tues., Feb 7 **Mission efforts**, and their relation to colonialism.
- Vatican I through the 1950s**
- Tues., Feb. 14 **The Church as it came out of World War II. Vatican II:** first two sessions under Pope John XXIII. Aggiornamento, Resourcement. The opening of the windows.
- The John O'Malley book, *What Happened at Vatican II?* will be invaluable reading through the next few weeks.
- Ecumenism:** the observers and their role. Where did it come from?
- Reconciliation with the Jews:** breaking with supercessionism. Reaction of shame after the *shoah*.
- Tues, Feb. 21 **Vatican II: sessions three and four** under Pope Paul VI.
- Tues., Feb. 28 **The birth control crisis:** Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.
- Spring Vacation, Monday, March 5 – Friday, March 9**
- Tues., March 13 **Role of theology in the Church.** Chapters in my own book, *Living Catholic Faith in a Contentious Age*, will be pertinent here.
- Tues., March 20 **Reform meets resistance.** Central authority in the Church and policies of restoration. Paul VI's hesitancy about the mindset of the Council, particularly about the change of teaching on Jews. His reservation of questions dealing with the celibacy of priests and ordination of women to decision by the Holy See alone.
- Invaluable for this period will be Mark Massa's book, *The American Catholic Revolution: How the '60s Changed the Church Forever*.
- Tues., March 27 **Shrinking recruitment to priesthood and to religious life of men or women since the later 1960s.** Massive defections from priesthood at that period. Exploration of causes.
- Tues., April 3 **Papacy of John Paul II.** Vast popularity and travels about the world. His role in bringing down the Communist system and in Catholic social teaching. Progressive action in ecumenism and inter-religious openings. Millennial apologies for the misdeeds of earlier generations in the Church.

Along with this, intense retraction of authority back to central offices of the Church and its Roman Curia.

Tues., April 10

The sex-abuse crisis. Its gradual emergence up to the January 6, 2002, Day of Doom. Media fascination with the subject. Remaining unclarity about its origins or pervasiveness. Its relation to power: rape as an instrument of domination.

Tues., April 17

Questions of faithfulness and of betrayal. (I will be away this week, at a conference in Assisi. Consequently, I will leave this class in the capable hands of Jerome Maryon, who will have plenty to say about it.)

What do we have a Church for? Are these only questions about the sex-abuse crisis, or how widely do they reach?

How to address the crisis. Defensiveness vs. serious address.

Tues., April 24

A Council of the Church as a traditional way of meeting major crises. Topics: 1) views of sexuality among Christians, 2) accountability in the Church. This is the topic of a chapter in my book, *Living Catholic Faith in a Contentious Age*.

Tues., May 1

Final reflections. Comparison with the previous major crises of the Christian Church: the East-West division of the 11th century and the Reformation crisis of the 16th, with the roots of both in complaints about the centralization of authority.

Texts (they will be on the Blackboard Vista): Mansi account of the last day of the Council of Trent; Address of Pope John XXIII at the opening session of the Second Vatican Council; Matthew 20, 20-28 (parallels Mark 10, 35-45, Luke 22, 24-27).

Study Days, Friday May 4 – Monday, May 7

Final Exam, Monday, May 14, 12:30-2:30.