

'The 1960s: A Watershed in Europe's Religious History?'

A Master Class to be held on Tuesday 14 October 2015

The 1960s are widely regarded as a period of dramatic social and cultural change in Europe – and indeed in other Western countries such as the United States and Canada. Most parts of western and northern Europe saw a rapid growth in living standards, whereby many items which had previously been luxuries (cars, televisions, telephones, washing machines, foreign holidays etc.) became available to the majority of the population). The high demand for labour in these booming economies attracted migrant workers from southern Europe, Turkey, Africa, Asia and the Caribbean (including many Muslims and Hindus). In the later 1960s there was a strong growth of political radicalism among students, and sometimes increasing working class militancy. This reached a climax in 1968, a year famous for strikes, demonstrations and confrontations between protesters and police. The late 1960s also saw the growth of a 'counter-culture', in which young people experimented with new life-styles. There was growing talk at the same time of a 'sexual revolution', and the end of the decade also saw the beginnings of the Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation movements. Meanwhile this was also a time of equally dramatic changes in the religious world. Most obviously the Second Vatican Council ('Vatican II') met in Rome from 1962 to 1965 – with big consequences both intended, and sometimes unintended, for the Roman Catholic Church – and the assembly of the World Council of Churches in Uppsala in 1968 was strongly influenced by the radical political climate of that year. But many other changes were happening, ranging from the growth of Islam and a growing interest in 'Eastern Religions', to the beginnings of the Charismatic Movement, to a sometimes very rapid drop in church-going.

Historians of religion, while generally agreeing that the 1960s were a period of major change, have disagreed as to which of these changes were most significant. One of the most influential answers has been that of the British historian, Callum Brown who called his book *The Death of Christian Britain*. In his view, the 1960s initiated a period of irreversible decline for Christianity in which Humanism was emerging as the dominant world-view. In my own book, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* I suggested that this period saw the end not of Christianity, but of Christendom – that is the social and political order in which the Christian Churches had a privileged position and a Christian identity (however vague) was taken for granted by most people. A third interpretation is offered by the British sociologists, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (*The Spiritual Revolution*), who suggest that 'religion' is being replaced by 'spirituality'. Meanwhile the Belgian historian, Patrick Pasture (see his contribution to Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, eds., *The Sixties and Beyond*), sees the main trend as a 'diversification of the religious landscape', influenced both by globalisation and by the emergence of 'a more open and individualistic society'. And somewhat similar ideas are presented by the German historian Benjamin Ziemann (in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 51 (2011)) who is strongly influenced by the sociology of Luhmann and Casanova, in the light of which he argues that secularisation has limited the number of areas of individual and social life in which the churches can play a significant role, but does not prevent their continuing or even growing importance in other areas.

Many aspects of the religious history remain unresolved therefore. In the master class I would like to discuss some of the following questions:

1. **What happened in the Sixties?** Which of the many changes in religion were most significant? Should it be seen simply as a time of secularisation, that is of *religious decline*, or should we be thinking more about *religious change*, including the emergence of new kinds of religious faith, or new kinds of relationship between religion and society?
2. **Were the 1960s as much of a turning-point as many historians have suggested?** Or were

the changes perhaps more gradual, and spread over a longer period of time – whether going back to the 1940 or 1950s and beyond, or going forward to the 1970s and '80s?

3. **What were the causes of change?** What was the relative significance of, for example: changes in the churches (e.g. Vatican II)
demography (e.g. immigration)
the economy (e.g. growing 'affluence')
politics (e.g. '1968', the feminist movement)
cultural developments (e.g. the 'sexual revolution')

4. **And were 'The Sixties' only a western and northern European phenomenon?** Or were they a time of major religious change across all of Europe, including the countries of the Eastern Bloc, and countries in southern and south-eastern Europe?

All students should begin by reading the following:

Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, Chapter 1 ('The Decline of Christendom'). This introduces the debates and places the 1960s in a longer-term historical framework.

Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, Chapter 8 ('The 1960s and Secularisation'). This provides a trenchant statement of the 1960s as a period of irreversible religious decline and of a particular interpretation of these changes as caused principally by a revolt by women against the church.

Patrick Pasture, 'Christendom and the Legacy of the Sixties,' *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique*, 99 (2004), pp 82-117. This provides an overview of the religious history of the decade.

Those wanting to go further might look at one of the following issues:

1. '1968':

What was the role of Christians in the radical movements of the later 1960s, and what impact did the political events of that time have on the churches?

Robert Gildea and others (eds), *Europe's 1968: Voices of Revolt*, chapter 8

Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, chapter 7

Siegfried Hermle and others (eds), *Umbrüche: Der deutsche Protestantismus und die sozialen Bewegungen in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren*, chapter by Angela Hager on the West German student movement

2. Sex, Gender and the Family

In what ways, if any, did religion influence the changes in sexual behaviour, gender relations, the family, or the laws relating to these? And what was the impact of these changes on religion?

Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, chapter 8

Callum Brown and Michael Snape (eds.), *Secularisation in the Christian World*, chapter by Callum Brown on 'Women and Religion'

Archiv für Sozialgeschichte, 51 (2011), article by Dagmar Herzog on abortion

Siegfried Hermle and others (eds.), *Umbrüche*, chapter by Simone Mantei on 'Protestantismus und sexuelle Revolution'

3. The Impact of Vatican II

To what extent and in what ways were the Catholic Church and the lives of Catholics changed by Vatican II? Can the Council be regarded as a turning-point in Catholic history? What were the

unintended consequences, if any, of the Council?

The literature on all aspects of Vatican II is vast. Here are a few examples of briefer contributions, focused especially on the impact of the Council.

Nicholas Atkin and Frank Tallett, *Priests, Prelates and People: A History of European Catholicism since 1750*, pp. 289-321

Giuseppe Alberigo and others (eds.), *The Reception of Vatican II*, chapter 1

Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of Vatican II*, chapter 1

4. Is there a 'European' religious history of the 1960s? Or are there many quite distinct national histories?

Again there is a very large literature relating to specific countries. Here are a few examples:

West Germany: the chapters by Mark Edward Ruff and Dagmar Herzog in Michael Geyer and Lucian Hölscher (eds.), *Die Gegenwart Gottes in der modernen Gesellschaft*

East Germany: Thomas Schmidt-Lux, *Wissenschaft als Religion: Szientismus im ostdeutschen Säkularisierungsprozess*, pp 162-183; Mary Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, chapter 4

Italy: John Pollard, *Catholicism in Modern Italy*, chapter 8; article by A.Maccarini in *Journal of Religion in Europe*, 5/4 (2012), pp 429-451

Netherlands: article by J.Kennedy in *Journal of Religion in Europe*, 5/4 (2012), pp 452-483; article P. Van Dam in *Contemporary European History*, 24/2 (2015), pp 213-232

Ireland: article by L.Fuller in *Journal of Religion in Europe*, 5/4 (2012), pp 484-513