

Dennis Doyle's revised edition of *The Catholic Church in a Changing World: A Vatican II-Inspired Approach* updates and enhances what has long been a valued guide to understanding Catholicism today. Marked by clear writing, a balanced approach, and attention to real-life questions, this book explores a variety of contemporary issues including authority, ecumenism, justice, ecology, and economics. Anyone seeking an introduction to the Catholic Church will find this book informative, accessible, and a source of rich discussion. Doyle's volume demonstrates, once again, that the best books are often written by the best teachers who have refined their presentation after years in the classroom and pastoral settings. As someone who has long benefitted from using Doyle's work with students, I am excited to make regular use of this new volume.

—Kristin Colberg  
Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary

This book encapsulates decades of Dennis Doyle's devoted teaching and perceptive scholarship. *The Catholic Church in a Changing World* brings the Second Vatican Council to life for a new generation of college students, and under Doyle's expert guidance, the council emerges as the ecclesial foundation for Catholics in the twenty-first century. The author weaves the council's constitutions together with helpful summaries and interpretations of magisterial documents from Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis. Doyle's classroom experiences enable him to articulate the questions today's students have about the Catholic Church, and this book does not shy away from highlighting the difficulties and disagreements within the Church on various theological issues. Packed with helpful discussion questions and bibliographies, *The Catholic Church in a Changing World* exemplifies one of the best introductions to Catholicism available to students today.

—Christopher Denny  
St. John's University

A superb overview of the Catholic faith, presented with clarity, nuance, depth, and breadth. Highly readable and thoroughly engaging, this book is a must read for anyone who wants to better understand the Catholic tradition!

—Mary Doak  
University of San Diego

This new edition of Dennis Doyle's *The Catholic Church in a Changing World*, the fruit of long classroom experience, reflects on every page his deep conviction that to be an informed Catholic today one must not only live the fruits of the council but connect, in some deep way, with the entire witness to the church in space and time. That conviction is set forth with clear writing, wide learning, and a great spirit of Christian generosity.

—Lawrence A. Cunningham  
University of Notre Dame

At more than fifty years since Vatican II, ecclesiology is still the key issue to understand Catholicism in the global world of today. I highly recommend Dennis Doyle's book on the ecclesiology of Vatican II—especially for those who want to connect the conciliar teaching, Pope Francis, and the issues facing the Church.

—Massimo Faggioli  
Villanova University

Winsomely written, *The Catholic Church in a Changing World* analyzes contemporary Catholic teachings and practices in light of their historical roots. Accessible, accurate, and balanced, the book concentrates on what unites Catholics. Dennis Doyle presents the various positions on contemporary disputed questions clearly and fairly. Never presuming to resolve divisive issues, he shows what is at stake and leaves readers to reflect on their own responses. This book makes an excellent textbook for undergraduate courses in religion and for study groups.

—Terrence W. Tilley  
Fordham University

Dennis Doyle's third edition of *The Catholic Church in a Changing World: A Vatican II-Inspired Approach* is a reflective study of Catholicism explained and Catholicism lived! The engaging anecdotal stories that begin each chapter connect the reader with the ever-evolving understanding and experience of Catholicism. Doyle taps into the rich heritage of the Church through the lens of the Second Vatican Council. Two indispensable documents of Vatican II, *Lumen gentium* and *Gaudium et spes*, provide the framework for examining the essential elements of the Tradition and the incredible impact the Council continues to have on the Church. Raised before the Council and then schooled as a theologian in light of Vatican II, Doyle brings a unique perspective to his reading of the Tradition. It is at once apparent that Doyle views his task as not only an academic examination of the Church, but a walk in faith that connects belief with life. This book includes a "live look" at the issues of today and demonstrates how the Spirit continues to move in the life of the Church.

—Sr. Shannon Schrein  
General Counselor, Sisters of St. Francis

I welcome Dennis Doyle's update of his excellent text on the nature and mission of the Catholic Church today. He is right, a lot has happened during the pontificates of Benedict and Francis. Hence, the update of the second edition of his book. I have used his books in some of my classes at the University of Southern California, and students consistently find Doyle's explanations clear and engaging.

—Fr. James L. Heft, S.M.  
President, Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies at USC

For years I used, with great success, the two earlier editions of this textbook with undergraduates, who appreciate its focus on their own experience and their desire to understand the Catholic faith. Doyle uses the documents of Vatican II in such a creative and intelligent way that, as a teacher, I have always felt confident that the book is the best introduction to the Church in contemporary society. I am grateful for this splendid updated edition, which integrates the papacy of Pope Francis and the continuing tensions within our pilgrim community.

—David Hammond  
Saint Joseph's College

The  
Catholic Church  
in a  
Changing World

A VATICAN II-INSPIRED APPROACH

DENNIS M. DOYLE



Created by the publishing team of Anselm Academic.

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Cover image: © John August Swanson, artist ([www.johnaugustswanson.com](http://www.johnaugustswanson.com)) PENTECOST, 2013, is based on a small etching from 1983. The scene is of the Holy Spirit descending upon the people, as mighty winds and tongues of fire, enabling them to speak of all the wonders of God.

In my image of PENTECOST, I see the Spirit of God, re-energizing all people and bringing us together to work for peace, to heal the Earth, and to honor the diversity of our life's journey.

*May God bless all of us in this search—*

*no matter which road we take,*

*no matter which path we need to follow.*

*No matter which way the Spirit leads us.*

*But let us journey it together.*

*“You must be born from above. The wind blows wherever it pleases; you hear its sound,*

*but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going.*

*That is how it is with all born of the Spirit.*

*Amen”*

*—Fr. Aelred Niespolo, OSB,*

*St Andrew's Abbey*

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Printed in the United States of America

7089

ISBN 978-1-59982-862-6

## Dedication

For my grandchildren, Maggie Jane, Annie, and Liam

## Author Acknowledgments

I wish to thank first my wife, Pat, who read and critiqued much of the manuscript. Her willingness to work with me on my projects over the years has contributed in no small way to whatever reputation I have as a writer. I thank also the Bavarian government, which provided me with funding to study and teach at the University of Regensburg for the summer of 2017, and especially Thomas Schärfl, who secured my grant and shepherded my stay. Thanks to Hans Hafner of the University of Potsdam for providing me office space near the end of my time in Germany. Thanks to Dan Thompson and also to more people than I can name at the University of Dayton for continually supporting and encouraging me in my research and writing. My gratitude goes also to my graduate assistants, Michael Romero and Scott Howland, for all of their help. I am grateful to the editorial staff at Anselm Academic for their interest in and support for this book. Finally, I sincerely thank my students at the University of Dayton, who continue to inspire me after several decades of teaching.

## Publisher Acknowledgments

Thank you to the following individuals who reviewed this work in progress:

Brian Flanagan, *Marymount University, Arlington, Virginia*

Paul Lakeland, *Fairfield University, Fairfield, Connecticut*

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## Church Documents

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Listed below are Catholic Church documents with Latin titles cited in this book. The Latin title is listed first, followed by the English translation in parentheses. In the book, such document titles will also appear in Latin followed by the English translation in parentheses at first mention in a chapter; any subsequent mention of the same title within that chapter will be the Latin title only.

An exception is made to this style for the documents *Lumen gentium* (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*) and *Gaudium et spes* (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*). As these two documents receive multiple mentions throughout the book, the Latin with English convention will be observed at first mention in each three-chapter section, with any subsequent mentions in that section using the Latin version only.

All titles are listed here for ease of cross-referencing, as the Latin will be unfamiliar to most readers.

*Ad gentes* (*Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*), Second Vatican Council, 1965

*Amoris laetitia* (*On Love in the Family*), Pope Francis, 2016

*Apostolicam actuositatem* (*Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*), Second Vatican Council, 1965

*Centesimus annus* (*On the Hundredth Anniversary [of Rerum novarum]*), Pope St. John Paul II, 1991

*Christifideles laici* (*The Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World*), Pope St. John Paul II, 1988

*Christus dominus* (*Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church*), Second Vatican Council, 1965

*Dei verbum* (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*), Second Vatican Council, 1965

*Dignitatis humanae* (*Declaration on Religious Freedom*), Second Vatican Council, 1965

*Donum veritatis* (*Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian*), Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1990

*Ecclesia in Africa* (*On the Church in Africa and its Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000*), Pope St. John Paul II, 1995

*Evangelii gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*), Pope Francis, 2013

*Familiaris consortio* (*On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*), Pope St. John Paul II, 1981

*Gaudet Mater Ecclesia* (*Opening Speech to the Council*), Pope St. John XXIII, 1962  
*Gaudium et spes* (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*), Second Vatican Council, 1965  
*Gravissimum educationis* (*Declaration on Christian Education*), Second Vatican Council, 1965  
*Inter insigniores* (*Declaration on the Question of Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood*), Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1976  
*Inter mirifica* (*Decree on the Mass Media*), Second Vatican Council, 1963  
*Laborem exercens* (*On Human Work*), Pope St. John Paul II, 1981  
*Laudato si'*: *On Care for Our Common Home*, Pope Francis, 2015  
*Libertatis conscientia* (*Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*), Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986  
*Libertatis nuntius* (*Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation"*), Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1984  
*Lumen gentium* (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*), Second Vatican Council, 1964  
*Mulieris dignitatem* (*On the Dignity and Vocation of Women*), Pope St. John Paul II, 1988  
*Mystici corporis Christi* (*On the Mystical Body of Christ*), Pope Pius XII, 1943  
*Nostra aetate* (*Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*), Second Vatican Council, 1965  
*Octogesima adveniens* (*A Call to Action*), Pope Paul VI, 1971  
*Optatam totius* (*Decree on Priestly Training*), Second Vatican Council, 1965  
*Ordinatio sacerdotalis* (*Priestly Ordination*), Pope St. John Paul II, 1994  
*Orientalium ecclesiarum* (*Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches*), Second Vatican Council, 1964  
*Pastores dabo vobis* (*I Will Give You Shepherds*), Pope St. John Paul II, 1992  
*Perfectae caritatis* (*Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life*), Second Vatican Council, 1965  
*Populorum progressio* (*On the Development of Peoples*), Pope Paul VI, 1967  
*Presbyterorum ordinis* (*Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*), Second Vatican Council, 1965  
*Rerum novarum* (*On the Condition of Labor*), Pope Leo XIII, 1891  
*Sacrosanctum concilium* (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*), Second Vatican Council, 1963  
*Sollicitudo rei socialis* (*On Social Concerns*), Pope St. John Paul II, 1987  
*Unitatis redintegratio* (*Decree on Ecumenism*), Second Vatican Council, 1964  
*Ut unum sint* (*That They May Be One*), Pope St. John Paul II, 1995

## Preface

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This is the third edition of a book first published in 1992, then titled *The Church Emerging from Vatican II: A Popular Approach to Contemporary Catholicism*. Many important developments have happened since then, including the papacies of Benedict XVI and Francis. The purpose of this new edition is to update the content for a new generation of readers. The new title, *The Catholic Church in a Changing World: A Vatican II-Inspired Approach*, acknowledges both the further distance in time and the continuing relevance of the Second Vatican Council.

This book can be used as an introduction to Catholicism. Since it focuses on the topic of church from a Catholic perspective, it can also be used as a text in ecclesiology, understood in a broad sense. I recommend that it be used in conjunction with two Vatican II documents, *Lumen gentium* (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*) and *Gaudium et spes* (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*).<sup>1</sup> The organization of these documents provides the basic framework for this book.

The church is an interpersonal reality, as are faith and religion more generally. For this reason, I intend this book to be also about you and about me, about our fears and hopes, our sorrows and our joys, our needs and our satisfactions. The church, faith, and religion exist within the context of our life stories, and these cannot be adequately understood apart from them. For this reason, I include throughout references to my own life and to the lives of others. When I use this material in a classroom, I begin by having my students write an autobiographical statement about their own faith and value development and where the church (or something analogous) does or does not fit for them.

I have found that many of my non-Catholic students feel by the end of the course that they have learned not only about Catholicism but also about their own denomination, religion, or worldview. I try to facilitate this in several ways. First, I stress the ecumenical nature of contemporary Catholicism and the open attitude toward other Christian traditions, religions, and worldviews. Today one cannot be a faithful Catholic without being ecumenically minded. Second, I spend significant time near the beginning of the course covering ecumenism. We discuss various ecumenical issues in the New Testament, the Reformation, and

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1. All quotations in this text from *Lumen gentium* and *Gaudium et spes* are taken from [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/index.htm](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/index.htm).

## 14 The Catholic Church in a Changing World

current interfaith dialogues. Throughout the course, I treat the divisions among Christians as stemming from complex causes with many rights and wrongs on both sides. Third, I encourage non-Catholic students to do their term projects on topics related to their own denomination, religion, or worldview. Fourth, I try to encourage ecumenical sensitivity in the classroom. I know from early on the religious or nonreligious background of each student, and I respectfully make this part of the ongoing conversation. There may be some teachers who feel that a student's personal background is irrelevant in an academic course. I am not one of them.

### “Church” as Understood in this Book

As used in this text, “Catholic Church” is intended to include those churches led by Catholic bishops who are in communion with the pope in Rome. It is customary in the ecumenical movement to specify “Roman Catholic Church,” but those in Eastern Catholic Churches with distinct liturgical rites feel excluded by such terminology. In public documents and formal agreements, the church as led by the pope is called the “Catholic Church.”

The word *church* has many legitimate meanings that can be viewed from different theological and historical standpoints. Resulting ambiguities can make editorial decisions about capitalization difficult, no less so in this book. The basic option in this text is to use a lowercase “church” whenever the term stands alone and to use “Catholic Church” in those instances when the worldwide Catholic Church is intended. In addition, because repeated use of “Catholic Church” can become cumbersome, a lowercase shorthand “church” may also sometimes refer to the Catholic Church, if the context makes the intention sufficiently clear.

Still, complications arise. Did Jesus found the “Church” or the “church”? The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) taught that various Christian churches and communities share in a partial (though not yet full) communion with the Catholic Church. Virtually all Christians today in some way claim their origins lie in Jesus and the apostles. Catholics retain the theological position, however, that the primacy of Peter and the leadership of the bishops as successors of the apostles reflect the witness of Scripture and Tradition, and that the Catholic Church is not to be regarded as simply one “denomination” among others. For ecumenical purposes, “church” will be the default when ambiguities arise, though without intending to deny such complexities.

For all of my ecumenical openness, my belonging to the Catholic Church leaves more than a slight trace throughout this book. It is only fair to tell you that I write from a Catholic perspective. That said, I believe that my commitment makes me neither uncritical nor disinterested in the pure search for truth.

It is my hope that whoever reads this book may find it useful in their own faith- and life-journey.

# 1

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## PART

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **SECTION 1 / The Church and Vatican II: An Overview**

1. The Catholic Church Today
2. Challenges for the Church
3. The Documents of Vatican II





## The Catholic Church Today

It was a mild but breezy September afternoon when Pope Francis emerged from his plane in Washington, DC, to begin a weeklong tour of the United States. This 2015 visit, the first time ever in the United States for this pope, who hails from Argentina, took place fifty years after the Second Vatican Council<sup>1</sup> had ushered in a new era in the history of the Catholic Church.

Pope Francis received a warm welcome throughout his journey not only from Catholics but also from many people from various faiths and backgrounds. This wide-ranging acceptance may have something to do with the unconditional acceptance that he has extended to others. Inclusion has been a major



Pope Francis, reaching out to the crowds, sets an example for a more inclusive, welcoming attitude in the Catholic Church. Is such a change possible without changing fundamental beliefs and practices?

1. The Second Vatican Council (often called "Vatican II") took place between 1962 and 1965. It was the twenty-first ecumenical council in the two-thousand-year history of the Catholic Church. Over two thousand bishops as well as many theologians and observers met to address major challenges facing the church in the twentieth century. This council will be the main topic of the next chapter.

theme throughout Francis's papacy. For example, in an early papal interview, when asked about gay priests, Francis responded, "Who am I to judge?" Another time, when washing feet during a Holy Thursday ceremony that traditionally had included only men, Francis washed the feet of two young women, one of whom was a Muslim. About two years later, he issued a papal order that Holy Thursday foot washings should include men and women, old and young, in accordance with the meaning of the ritual. During his tour of cities in the eastern United States, Francis continued his practice of reaching out to people in the crowds, especially the afflicted, the disabled, and the young.

There are many such examples of Francis speaking and acting inclusively. He appears to be signaling at least a change in tone and atmosphere in Catholic attitude, if not changes in basic Catholic teaching. Most Catholics have welcomed his words and deeds as a breath of fresh air. Some traditional and conservative Catholics, however, view him suspiciously. Will this pope be able to change attitudes and outlooks without eventually changing basic Catholic Church teachings?

## Overview

This chapter introduces the Catholic Church of today by considering the views and actions of Pope Francis against the background of the Second Vatican Council. This entire book takes its outline and structure from two of the council's documents, *Lumen gentium* (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*) and *Gaudium et spes* (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*).

## Inclusion Rooted in the Second Vatican Council

Pope Francis's emphasis on inclusion embodies and extends one of the key themes of Vatican II. The word *inclusion* has many distinct but overlapping meanings. To avoid confusion, it is helpful to consider some of those meanings:

- Getting people already within a group more involved and valued, such as by emphasizing equality in spiritual dignity among all the members of a parish and increasing participation in carrying out the Catholic Church's mission
- Reaching out to those on the margins of one's group, such as by being more accepting toward those who have been divorced and remarried, are single parents, or are gay, lesbian, or transgender
- Consulting and taking seriously a wide range of voices and opinions when making important judgments and decisions
- Developing positive connections with other groups, such as by recognizing and cooperating with members of various Christian traditions and other religions, and also other worldviews

- Reaching out to the socially marginalized, such as by attending to the needs of ethnic and racial minorities, the sick and the elderly, the disabled and the mentally ill
- Respecting the “Other” (those markedly different from YOU), not simply as they can be assimilated into one’s viewpoint, but precisely as “Other,” with their own culture, faith, history, distinctive characteristics, and viewpoints

A notably inclusive teaching of Vatican II, the universal call to holiness, is expressed in chapter 5 of *Lumen gentium*. When I was growing up in Philadelphia in the 1950s, there was a tendency among Catholics to interpret a young person’s inclination toward holiness as a sign that that person was most probably called either to priesthood (if a male) or to religious life as a sister or a brother. The very word *church*<sup>2</sup> at that time was most often used to refer collectively to the ordained and religious as distinct from laypeople.

*Lumen gentium* declared that the call to holiness includes all members of the church (LG 40). In its most basic sense, “the church” includes the entire People of God prior to any distinction among clergy, religious, and laypeople (LG 9–17). Distinctions among these states in life were still retained, and the ordained and the religious remain important in the Catholic Church of today. In *Lumen gentium*, however, these distinctions were contextualized within a larger framework acknowledging that there is no distinction when it comes to being called to holiness. All Catholics are fully included in that call.

Moreover, the efforts at inclusion in *Lumen gentium* did not stop with the Catholic Church’s own members. Chapter 2 of the document begins with a paraphrase of something Peter says in Acts 10:35: “At all times and in every race God has given welcome to whosoever fears Him and does what is right” (LG 9). In what at the time was a striking move, the chapter goes on to recognize in a positive way the relationships between the Catholic Church and various other Christian traditions. Moreover, the chapter then expresses an open, welcoming manner toward people of various faiths. Although the chapter clearly retains the Catholic belief that the Catholic Church represents in the fullest way the church as planned, founded, and sustained by God, the move toward a radically more inclusive approach to others, especially when compared with earlier official statements, is unmistakable. *Lumen gentium*’s inclusiveness helped set the stage for the argument in *Gaudium et spes* that “since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery” (GS 22).

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2. For a relatively full discussion of when and how the terms *church* and *Catholic Church* are used in this book, please see the preface.

## Balance Achieved through *Aggiornamento* and *Ressourcement*

Recognizing that inclusion was an important and central theme of Vatican II should not be done one-sidedly, disregarding how the council's teachings represented a delicate balance between the old and the new. *Aggiornamento*, or “updating,” is the Italian word used by Pope St. John XXIII in naming the goal of opening up the windows of the Catholic Church, letting in fresh air, and engaging in dialogue with the modern world.

John XXIII, however, had no intention of throwing away anything truly basic to Catholic tradition in exchange for more modern ideas. As he stated in his opening address to the council, “The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the formulation in which it is clothed is another.”<sup>3</sup> John XXIII's goal was to preserve the basic teachings of the faith without simply repeating formulas from famous popes and theologians of the past. He wanted instead for the bishops and their theological experts to express the meaning of the gospel and the teaching of the Catholic Church in a way that would engage the people of that time. A term often used to describe the way to accomplish *aggiornamento* is *ressourcement*, a French term meaning “return to the sources.” In other words, the way to bring the church “up to date” is by drawing, in a fresh way, upon its richest traditions. It is important neither to exaggerate nor underappreciate the type and degree of changes brought about by Vatican II. Many voices contributed to the documents, often with strong disagreements underlying compromises in wording. At the council's end, the consensus was that through and, at times, in spite of the sometimes all-too-human contributions, the teaching of the council was ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit.

Pope Francis has an interesting connection with Vatican II. His five immediate predecessors attended the council.<sup>4</sup> All of them were involved in the excitement of this Spirit-filled event as well as in the political wrangling that often took place behind the scenes. Francis, in his priestly education and formation, has been deeply formed by the teaching of the council without having been present for the struggles and maneuvering. He has come to the office of the papacy with fresh eyes and renewed hope. Each pope brings with him not only his own style but his own priorities. Like his predecessors, and like Vatican II itself, Francis maintains a strong concern for handing on the Catholic Tradition while engaging the issues of his time—for the issues that people face today are also issues that Catholics face.

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3. *Gaudet Mater Ecclesia*, “Pope John's Opening Speech to the Council,” trans. Joseph A. Komonchak, <https://jakomonchak.files.wordpress.com>.

4. John XXIII was the pope who called for the council. Paul VI became pope during the time of the council. John Paul I and John Paul II were bishops at the council. Pope Benedict XVI attended the council as a theological expert.

## The Challenges and Opportunities of Today

The world of today is different from the world of the early 1960s when Vatican II took place. The continuing process of globalization has brought with it many difficulties and many opportunities. Communications technology has shrunk the world, making it more and more apparent that ultimately one human community underlies the great variety of human groupings. There is also a developing sense of pluralism within and beyond nations.

As more and more people interact across the globe, however, there is a growing awareness that when it comes to wealth, education, and social opportunity, people are not equal at all. Although evidence shows that many people each year are being lifted out of abject poverty, other evidence indicates that both within countries and between nations the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen. In addition, global awareness and concern is growing about the seriousness of the ecological crisis of climate change and its notable impact on the poor, as Pope Francis indicates in his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato si': On Care for Our Common Home* (LS 13, 20, 25).<sup>5</sup> For example, climate change caused, at least in part, by overconsumption in relatively affluent countries contributes to the loss of farmland and famine in Africa (LS 51).<sup>6</sup> There is also much global unrest, and terrorist threats and attacks have brought to contemporary life an everyday angst that is truly terrifying.

For more than a century, the percentage of Catholics in the US population had remained stable (between 24 and 26 percent). In recent decades, the large number of Catholic immigrants from Latin America had helped to maintain this percentage. Current studies, however, suggest that the percentage of Catholics in the United States has begun to drop significantly, to about 20.8 percent, whereas the percentage of nonreligious persons (nones) has increased rapidly—from about 16 to 23 percent in seven years.<sup>7</sup> Most of those who now claim to be nonreligious are former Catholics.

The causes of this drop in the percentage of Catholics are many and varied. Catholicism in the United States has long been linked with immigrants, ethnic neighborhoods, and close-knit urban communities. High levels of education, affluence, and mobility among Catholics may have contributed to a breakdown

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5. Quotes from *Laudato si'* are from [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html).

6. Jeffrey Gettleman, "Loss of Fertile Land Fuels 'Looming Crisis' across Africa," *New York Times*, July 30, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/29/world/africa/africa-climate-change-kenya-land-disputes.html>.

7. "America's Changing Religious Landscape," Pew Research Center, Washington, DC, May 12, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape>; also "US Public Becoming Less Religious," Pew Research Center, Washington, DC, November 3, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/11/03/u-s-public-becoming-less-religious>.

of older patterns and values.<sup>8</sup> Secularization, the process in which religions lose their influence in a society, is also a likely factor in the drop in numbers.

As the percentage of Catholics in Europe and in the United States has declined, the overall number of Catholics in Latin America and Africa has grown, causing some commentators to say that the center of gravity of the Catholic Church has shifted to the Southern Hemisphere.<sup>9</sup> It seems no accident that the Catholic Church now has its first Latin American pope. Evangelical Protestants and Pentecostals have also experienced dramatic rates of growth throughout the global South.

I get the impression from students in my classes that many young Christians today are interested in whatever will unite people rather than divide them. My students tend to be suspicious of religion as an agent of division within a pluralistic world. What may look like “relativism” (a lack of concern for truth) to their elders often reflects the high value that young Christians place upon respecting the Other as “Other.” What many young people seem to be saying is not so much that all viewpoints are equal but rather that all people should be equal and that their viewpoints must be respected.

When Pope Francis responded to the aforementioned question about gay priests by saying, “Who am I to judge?” some Catholics worried. For many more Catholics, however, the humble and open-minded tone of his response seemed a breath of fresh air, and especially for those who place a priority on the Vatican II theme of inclusion as extended and applied to a pressing concern for the world today.<sup>10</sup>

## Summary

This chapter has shown the shared commitment of Vatican II and Pope Francis to values of inclusion and balance. The next chapter explores some of the challenges faced by the Catholic Church that led to the calling of the council.

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8. Among the many possible causes for the drop in numbers is a sex abuse scandal that rocked the United States, with its high point coming in 2002. Not only had priests abused children, but, in a number of cases, bishops were proven to have covered up the problem by transferring abusive priests from parish to parish and keeping silent about the problem. A new wave of media attention was directed towards such scandals after the release of a Pennsylvania Grand Jury Report covering the past seventy years was released on August 14, 2018.

9. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

10. Radically different assessments of Pope Francis’s approach to controversial issues can be found in two books with an interesting overlap in their titles. For a traditional view, see Ross Douthat, *To Change the Church: Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018); for progressive views, see Gerard Mannion, ed., *Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism: Evangelii Gaudium and the Papal Agenda* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Pope Francis gives an explanation of his “who am I to judge?” comment in his book, *The Name of God Is Mercy: A Conversation with Andrea Tornielli*, trans. Oonagh Stransky (New York: Random House, 2016), 61–62.



### For Further Reflection

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1. Where do you stand, in terms of your life experience, in regard to matters of faith, religion, Christianity, and Catholicism? How do you think that your social location (family, community, friends, etc.) might affect how you relate to this book?
2. What is your response to Pope Francis's reference to gay priests when he said, "Who am I to judge?"
3. What do you think are the major causes of the recent drop in the number of Catholics in the United States?
4. Do you think that a strong acceptance of various viewpoints represents an indiscriminate, anything-goes "relativism" or an important respect for the Other as "Other"?
5. What might Catholics and other Christians hope to gain from a study of the Catholic Church? What might people of other faiths and worldviews hope to gain?

### Suggested Readings

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- Gehring, John. *The Francis Effect: A Radical Pope's Challenge to the American Catholic Church*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015.
- Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics*. A study by St. Mary's Press of Minnesota, Inc., in collaboration with the Center for Applied Research in the Apostate (CARA). Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2017.
- Jenkins, Philip. *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.