

Trujillo, Brandon

REL1300

Project #4

Evolution of Religion

Many religions have survived over the years gaining strength and followers, while many other religions have lost their following due to new religions becoming more popular or corruptions in the church. Though any religions are able to hold on to many of their traditional practices and values, many values have become out dated with the times. Many will argue that values and practices from well over a century should not be changed because they are essential parts of the religion, but the world is an ever changing place and over time even religion must change eventually. The modernization of a religion is required for that religion to survive, Pope Francis and the changes he has made are a great example of how relevant change is important in the new era of Catholicism and why it will survive.

Looking at religions that have both refused to change during certain eras and at other times been willing to adapt to new ideas that have come, Catholicism has an amazing amount of history that covers both of these ideas due to its sacred document and bi laws. Looking at how many changes are going are happening with Catholicism it makes a perfect test subject for the theory that religion needs to evolve to survive.

Catholicism was created with the purpose of modifying and improving the organization and the ideals of the Christian religion so that it would be easier to spread their ideals and territories. The initial creation of this new religion was an evolution separating themselves from Judaism that was needed for

them to grow into the religion to new leaps and bounds in the 1st century AD. The Church was founded in order to spread the ideals and teaching of Jesus Christ.

The Christian religion in the beginning dealt with many years of persecution during the beginning of the religion. The Roman Empire was one of the first to persecute the Christian people, the leader of the Roman Empire at this time Nero lead a furious campaign which tortured and punished Christians. One of the major reasons for this was that many of the holidays and customs from the Greco/Roman religions were not being practiced. Some of these practices were religious ceremonies that were meant to please their gods so that they would bring good harvests, weather, and health to the people.

It would not be until the rise of Constantine during the beginning of the 4th century that Christianity would be accepted into the Roman Empire as a legal religion to practice. But it was not as simple as that, certain things had to be added in order to have many of the old Greco/Roman religions to be satisfied with Christianity. It had to adopt the holidays and festivals such as the Roman holiday of Saturnalia, a weeklong celebration that took place from December 17-25. The hope of the Christians was that this adoption of pagan holidays would bring more people to convert. This was holiday where men would become extremely drunk, rape, murder, and over act in a manner that would not be accepted in today's society. In order to make the religion fit in with their Christian ideal they changed the last day of the celebration on December 25th to the birthday of Jesus. Because of the new connection to the Christian profit many of the violent practices of Saturnalia were thrown out and the earliest Christmas holidays were celebrated by drinking, sexual indulging oneself, and naked caroling in the streets.

Under many circumstances Christianity has been able to adapt in order to preserve and expand its faith to new heights. But on many occasions in history there have been times when Christianity was unresponsive to new ideals either because of corruptions in the church or because of an inherit conflict

between the new idea and holy texts and values. One moment in their history that particularly hits this mark is the Protestant Reformation. At the end of the Medieval Christian era the church had become a very wealthy organization that held much of the land in Europe and controlled much of the government as well. Many appalling abuses of power upon followers of the Christian faith. While many upper members of the priesthood did not see a problem with these missuses of authority other members were not willing to stand for the misconduct of the Church. Martin Luther was the father of this movement that was challenging for the change of the many corruptions taking place in the church. His most famous demonstration was the nailing of his "95 Theses" to the front door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany. Rather than dealing with the corruptions in the Catholic Church those in higher positions decided to have Martin Luther excommunicated from the Church. The Lutheran Church was formed as a result of this along with many other sects breaking away from the Catholic Church.

The other reason that many religions refuse to accept new ideas is that it goes directly against the idea that is a part of their mythology or a core part of the belief system for that religion. For many people it is the faith that the word of their holy texts are one hundred percent accurate and are the words of god. Many issues have challenged the words of holy texts including that the world is older than a few thousand years and the theory of evolution. This is because there appears to be three different types of followers, the one that follows the text to the letter, the one that believes in the ideals of what the holy text is trying to teach and the last one is the one that open to change as long as the most important lessons and morals of the religion is still being addressed. Although many are accepting of new ideals into the religion many of those who are unwilling to accept these changes on many occasions are outspoken individuals that are willing to condemn any new ideal and even persecute those that support the idea and sometimes those that will not support their argument with the mentality that "if you are not with me your against me mentality". This causes a lot of problems as people are bullied into endure the idealistic preaching of extremists.

In America nearly half of people raised in Catholic households will leave the Catholic Church. According to the August 2015 PRRI (Public Religion Research Institute)/RNS Survey, of those that leave Catholicism 49% will become unaffiliated with any religious organization, 40% will join another sect of Christianity most likely protestant, and the last 11% percent will leave Christianity all together for another religion or become atheist. The Majority of those who leave the church are under the age of 25. Dean R. Hoge an American sociologist, who spent several decades studying American Catholics, classifies young Catholic dropouts into three main categories. Those that leave due to family problems, those that are bored and tired of the church, and those that have a lifestyle that is not condoned or conflicts with catholic ideals.

Although family problems are not issues that the church will be able to change most likely the other two issues are problems that can be changed directly by the actions of the Church. First, new generation do not see how the church is relevant in today's society. This is more of change that has to be addressed by the individual churches and priests to make sure that each person has their own individual connection with god. This will drastically make a difference in comparison to the traditional mass that does not address the problems of everyone that is attending their services.

The last problem is more of what needs to be addressed by the upper level of the priesthood. The laws and rules of the church that tell people how they should and shouldn't live their lives are not current and do not deal with many of the people who live lifestyles that are not accepted by those lives. One of the many area's this effects is the church's moral problems, such as masturbation, homosexuality, premarital sex, living with a partner before marriage, and many others. These are only a few of the reasons people will leave the Catholic Church. Although the old-school thought of the church was that anyone that did not fit into the mold of what is a perfect Catholic on many occasions would be excommunicated.

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected as the 266th pope of the Roman Catholic Church becoming Pope Francis I on March 13th 2013. He is the first non-European pope coming from Buenos Aires, Argentina he would take a much different path than most of the previous Popes that had done before him. The oldest son of an Italian immigrant family he studied chemistry, philosophy and theology. During his studies Jorge was a biker who worked at a night club in Buenos Aires as a bouncer. In an interview with CNN, Pope Francis stated, "I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner."

In December 1969 Jorge Bergoglio was ordained into the priesthood at the age of 33. He would continue down the holy path becoming the archbishop of Buenos Aires in 1988. Then three years later in 2001 he would be elevated to the rank of cardinal of Saint Robert Bellarmino. Then In 2013 at the age of 76 Jorge Bergoglio was named the 266th pope of the Roman Catholic Church. He took his title after St. Francis of Assisi of Italy and officially became Pope Francis I.

Pope Francis takes over as pope after the controversial resignation of Pope Benedict XVI had brought many criticisms to the Catholic Church. Although the resignation brought about a lot of bad press Pope Francis had a fresh attitude that people loved. There was no doubt about Pope Francis is a people person and was seen by the people as a very real kind of person. Eighty percent of Catholics believe that Pope Francis understand the needs and views of American Catholics. A majority of former Catholics say that they still are not willing to return to Catholicism, they see the pope as an open minded, humble and compassionate person who understands that the Catholic Church is in need for some immediate changes if it is going to stay relevant in the 21st century. Fifty-one percent of former Catholics declared in the August 2015 PRRI/RNS Survey that they believed that Pope Francis attract more Catholics back to the Church. Even Raul Castro the current leader of Communist Cuba, after meeting Pope Francis declared: "I read all the speeches of the pope, his commentaries and if the pope continues this way, I will go back to praying and go back to the church, and I'm not joking."

Although many have seen the new pope as a great spiritual leader and an inspirational world leader, other people have a very different view about Pope Francis calling him the Anti-Christ and that he will be the downfall of the Catholic Church. This is because of many of the claims and changes that the Pope has made to the church's acceptance of certain lifestyles that have been previously condemned by most of the Catholic and Christian leaders in the past. Several conservative Christian groups and Bible enthusiasts who take every word of the bible as the word of god find the new pope's ideals to be acts of "Paganism".

Pope Francis was elected for the purpose of restructuring the Vatican bureaucracy and reform the church. He has made many drastic changes in the church's image. One way that he has changed things is the cloths that he wears have gone from being showy and almost royal garbs that had been seen from previous popes has been replaced by a very basic white priests attire with simple black shoes. According to Pope Francis regarding the red, gold, and jewel encrusted clothing offered to him to wear as many of the popes before him had he stated, "look at the peacock; it's beautiful if you look at it from the front. But if you look at it from behind, you discover the truth. . . . Whoever gives in to such self-absorbed vanity has huge misery hiding inside them." Another Image change that was made by Pope Francis was the use of a small plain white wood chair rather than a gold and jewel encrusted throne used by the previous popes. Symbolizing that many of these changes he is making are to make a much simpler and traditional ideal of the Catholic Church.

Beyond the changing the image of the Catholic Church the pope has made many changes that have been controversial. Most of them have to do with the Vatican reform to a much more open minded sense of what is acceptable. Many of the changes that he has made include the acceptance of homosexuality, no longer having divorce be an excommunicator, etc. Though many thing have changed to keep the religion up to date with a modern society the has kept many of the traditional values of

Catholicism such as being anti-abortion, being against contraception, marriage is a sacred relationship between a man and woman, etc.

In the end there are a small amount of religions that have succeeded in surviving over the centuries. The reason they were able to survive is because they were able to adapt to the needs of the people. With new religions always coming around, becoming the next fad religion that has flash and presence in that attracts people because it's in style at the moment. Modernizing is the only way that a religion survives to make its following stronger and larger every passing generation.

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