

CONCLAVE OF THE ELITE IN THE MODERN
CHURCH: UNCONVENTIONAL LESSONS
FROM THE PAST FOR THE PRESENT

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Introduction

The history of the protestant church began with the events leading up to the reformation under the inspiring leadership of Martin Luther in the 16th century. The Roman Catholic Church had existed over 1500 years before the reformation. Martin Luther was himself a Catholic priest who had no intention of leaving the church.

By the time of the reformation cries, the church had established itself as the most dominant political power, superseding the powers of the emperors in many cases. Ecclesiastical authority was vested in the papacy and the hierarchy of cardinals. Latin was the official language of the church and creed. Only the clergy had access to the Holy Scriptures and only they could read and interpret for the laity.

The papacy had embarked on the enormous task of building the fabulous St. Petersburg Cathedral in Rome. There was shortage of funding to complete the building project, so the idea of selling indulgences as a means for fund raising became attractive. Those who bought the indulgences were assured forgiveness of sins for themselves as well as for their beloved deceased who were lingering in purgatory.

These practices in the church were so disturbing for the early reformers that they began to seek ways to redress the issues. Martin Luther's studies in Romans and Galatians opened his eyes to Paul's statement, "The just shall live by faith" (Rom 1:17; Gal 2:16). For the first time since the early days of the church, a priest understood that salvation came by faith alone in Christ alone, not by faith plus works as the church taught. This became the battle cry of the reformation, *sola fide, sola scriptura!* Hence, this was the beginning of *ad fontes* (to the sources), a call to return to the scripture to search for biblical guidance in the life of the church.

In this discussion I have chosen to narrow down our focus in history to specific periods of time that are more relevant for our purpose, the period from 1123 to 1215 Anno Domini. This period was marked by four Councils of the Western General Councils held in Lateran. Our attention will be focused on the 1st and 2nd Lateran Council, while the three others will be surmised briefly.

The First Lateran Council 1123 Anno Domini Under the Pontificate of Pope Calixtus II

The First Lateran Council followed a terrible period of political and ecclesiastical conflict resulting from the reign of Emperor Henry IV, who subverts the authority of the pope through political maneuvers. By this time, the papacy was itself marked by conflicts that resulted in the death of popes by strangling, beating to death, and/or poisoning. In fact, the average reign of the popes was barely 4-5 years. Emperor Henry IV took advantage of Simony¹ and Clerical Immorality to pursue his evil ambitions. It is observed that, "The kings and princes were taking money (or lands or property) as the price of appointing a man to be bishop or abbot; the bishop or abbot was taking money, etc., from men who wished to be ordained, and from priests who wanted parishes, canonries, and so forth; the priests in their turn, were only ministering for a price." Lay Investiture was a common practice of the Emperors as a means to control the church as well as their subject. It was Pope Gregory VII (Hildebrand) in 1075 who held a synod in Rome to abolish the practice of Lay Investiture. This synod decreed, "Whoever receives a

¹ The word traces its origin to Simon the Sorcerer who attempted to buy spiritual powers from the apostles. Henry IV sold ecclesiastical offices at court with the result that Bishops were appointed to dual roles of minister of the church and minister of the empire. This he did in disregard of the warnings of the Pope and the threat of excommunication.

spiritual office at the hands of a layman, whether he be baron, duke, king, or emperor, is to be deposed, and a layman who dares to confer a spiritual office, is to be excommunicated.”² Henry IV died in the process of fighting the pope after his excommunication and exile. His son Henry V followed his father’s steps but later signed a compromise that ended the conflict with Pope Calixtus II on September 23 1122.

The Resolutions of this council of 22 canons dealt mainly with matters of Church Discipline. Resolutions include:

- Condemnation of Simony and clerical immorality
- Lay investiture was condemned by confirming the fact that spiritual authority can only come from the Church and by abolishing the claim of the emperors to appoint their own popes
- Those who counterfeited money, or robbed or kidnapped pilgrims on their way to Rome, were to be excommunicated
- Those in Holy orders must not marry
- Marriages already contracted by such persons are to be broken, and the parties bound to penance

The Second Lateran Council 1139 AD During the Pontificate of Pope Innocent II

The Council registered 500 bishops and about 1000 abbots from Austria, England, France, Germany, Italy, Jerusalem and Switzerland. Resolutions of the Council:

- Marriages contracted by monks, subdeacons, deacons, priests and bishops were to be henceforth considered null and void
- Clergy were to don clerical attire and not that of the nobility or of the commoner
- Battles were to be fought between knights and soldiers. Merchants, farmers and clergy were not to be attacked not taken prisoner.
- Usury was condemned
- Those who struck a cleric incurred ipso facto (automatic) excommunication reserved to the pope
- Laity were forbidden from assisting at the Mass of a priest who was married or living in sin
- The practice of raiding the bishop’s palace after the death of the bishop was condemned
- Bishops were commanded to instruct their people on the need for true repentance from the heart, not merely exterior manifestations of penance (Christian belief)
- Heretics who denied the sacraments of Baptism, Holy Eucharist, Matrimony and Holy Orders were excommunicated
- The sale of Holy Oils and the practice of demanding money to perform burial were condemned

* Let me briefly mention that one of the “bitter complains that was addressed at the 3rd Council of the Lateran in 1179 was that some members of the Holy Order were abusing penitential discipline (or church discipline) by providing loopholes for influential sinners. They accepted

² Francisco Radecki and Dominic Radecki, *Tumultuous Times: The Twenty General Councils of the Catholic Church and Vatican II and Its Aftermath* (Wayne, MI: St. Joseph's Media, 2004), 87. I wish to add here that another main object of the reformers’ zeal is the tendency for the priest’s son to become a priest, forming a clerical caste within the church; and for the ordained son to take over his father’s benefice, church property becoming a family endowment.

from lay lords grants of tithes and benefices, admitting them to the sacraments although excommunicated, giving them Christian burial.

The Fourth Council of the Lateran 1215 Anno Domini Pope Innocent III Presided over the Council

This Council was considered the largest and most important Council ever before the Council of Trent.

The Fourth and final Council of Lateran came up with 70 canons (or resolutions) summarized in the following:

- The church's belief in Transubstantiation
- Definition of traditional belief in the Blessed Trinity
- Condemnation of some Heresies (Monarchs were responsible for the eradication of heresies within their domains)
- Those baptized by latins were not to be rebaptized by Greeks
- Order of Precedence in authority: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem
- Synods were to take place to correct abuses
- Bishops were to correct abuses in their dioceses
- Clergy were not to engage in secular pursuits
- Clergy in Major Orders were commanded to pray the Divine office daily
- Clergy were not to pronounce the sentence of death, nor act as judges in extreme criminal cases. Clergy were forbidden to take part in trials involving capital punishment. Further, they were not to act as surgeons nor take an active role in the military save that of chaplain
- Churches were to be kept clean
- The Holy Eucharist and chrism were to be kept under lock and key
- The Annual Easter Duty: All Catholics of both sexes who had attained the age of discretion (the use of reason) were to confess their sins at least once a year and receive Holy Communion at least once during the Easter time. This Law of the Church was declared binding under pain of mortal sin and those failing to observe it were to be deprived of ecclesiastical burial
- Bishops have the serious obligation to ensure the proper training of candidates for the holy priesthood
- Clergy were exempt from taxation by secular rulers except with permission from the Holy See

Lesson #1 The Separation of Church And State

When either the Church or State interferes in the affairs of the other, the result is always devastating for the Church. Ours is a spiritual/moral calling and service and the State's is social and economic. There are usually conflicts in the area of social issues but the Church is the moral guide of the State in social matters.

Lesson #2: The Danger of Legislating Morality and Spirituality (Legislating Morality in the Conclave or the Pulpit)

Lesson #3: The Priesthood of All Believers

Lesson #4: The Role of Clergy in Building the Kingdom of God

Lesson #5: The Source of Authority in the Church is the Word of God

Applications to the Modern Church: In light of the above description of the church in the time of the Lateran Councils and the words of our Lord Jesus the Christ, discuss the pitfalls of the church in the past and today. What are the unconventional Lessons for us? Please share your observations.

Conclusion

Observation: Does this resound the clarion call in Luke 22:24-27, “²⁴ A dispute also started among them over which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. ²⁵ So Jesus said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those in authority over them are called 'benefactors.' ²⁶ Not so with you; instead the one who is greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the one who serves ²⁷ For who is greater, the one who is seated at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is seated at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

What a contrast???