

Melissa J. Wilde. *Vatican II: A Sociological Analysis of Religious Change*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. 224 s. ISBN:978-0-691-11829-1

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The Second Vatican Council (also known as Vatican II) is considered one of the most important institutional religious changes since the Protestant Reformation in the Christian tradition. In the Council, the Roman Catholic Church relinquished its claim that it was the one true church, abdicated power claims over the states, allowed to use the local language in the Mass, eased dietary restrictions, and so on. Although almost all bishops did not expect a significant change in the Council before attending it, substantial changes took place in the teachings, practices and identity of the Catholic Church. How and why did this happen? In the recent years, Melissa J. Wilde's study of *Vatican II: A Sociological Analysis of Religious Change*, which received the 2008 Distinguished Book Award from the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and the 2009 Distinguished Book Award from the Sociology of Religion Section of the American Sociological Association, comes into prominence to understand the factors that lead to religious change in Vatican II. Depending on primary documents from the Vatican archives and the transcript of interviews conducted with important bishops and theologians during the Council, Wilde focuses on the organizational strategies of bishops and the legitimacy concern of progressive bishops about the Catholic Church in order to explain the dynamics of religious change in the Council.

Despite the powerful impact of conservative bishops in the Council, progressive bishops succeeded in revising the teachings of the Church. Therefore, Wilde examines their strategies, organizations and priorities to exhibit how they mobilized other bishops to pass their progressive agenda. In order to understand the organizational strategies of bishops, Wilde categorizes bishops into four major groups in accordance with their

priorities, expectation and regions after examining their voting patterns in the Council. The first group was those who were from European Catholic monopolies (e.g., Italy and Spain). These bishops were generally very conservative and resistant to change. The second group was those who were from non-monopolistic Christian countries in Europe (e.g., Germany and the United Kingdom) and North America (e.g., the United States and Canada). They were the engine of the change in the Council because the legitimacy of the Catholic Church was a serious concern for them. They prioritized ecumenism or to develop a better relationship with Protestants. The third group was those who were from Latin America. In these countries, the Catholic Church had monopoly, but the Church was in crisis because of the increasing impact of Marxist movements and Protestant missionaries. The concern of the bishops in this group was social justice and to try to find some ways to reach the poor and nonbelievers. Thus, they were open to changes in order to strengthen the position of the Catholic Church against Protestants missionaries and Marxist movements. The fourth group was those who were from Asian and African countries (or newly emerging fields). The concern of the bishops in this group was to help the growth of the Catholic Church in their countries. Therefore, they mostly shared the concern of Latin American and Northern bishops.

Wilde points out that the bishops in the first meetings discovered their agency role in order to change the teachings of the Church in the Council. They discussed all issues and voted for them through open elections. Particularly, progressive bishops, those who were mostly from North America and non-monopolistic European societies, established an effective and flexible organization to negotiate and compromise controversial issues. They established informal organizations and meetings after official meetings with bishops coming from Asia, Africa, and Latin America to create a consensus. Thus, they were able to mobilize other bishops to gain support toward their progressive agenda. However, conservative bishops, generally coming from monopolistic Catholic countries such as Italy and Spain could not get wide support from bishops because of the lack of strategic organization and collegiality.

Wilde examines three issues to understand why religious change took place in the Second Vatican Council: (I) the Declaration on Religious Freedom, (II) the status of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and (III) birth control (contraception). In the Council, the Declaration on Religious Freedom passed whereas the elevation of the status of the Blessed Virgin Mary and

the stance of the church toward birth control did not pass. Progressive bishops were able to pass the Declaration on Religious Freedom despite the resistance of conservative bishops. They were also successful in preventing the elevation of the status of the Blessed Virgin Mary although conservative bishops struggled for passing it. Finally, a large number of bishops were reluctant to change the Catholic Church's ban on contraception even if it was a central issue to the daily lives of lay Catholics.

Why did progressive bishops struggle for passing the Declaration on Religious Freedom and resist against the elevation of the status of the Blessed Virgin Mary? According to Wilde, Catholic bishops in Northern America and Europe were under considerable critiques coming from Protestants toward the legitimacy of the Catholic Church. As a response to the pressure, they pursued at making manifest that the Catholic Church was open to religious freedom. Thus, Wilde argues that the legitimacy concern of ecumenically oriented bishops, particularly the bishops coming from Northern America and Europe, shaped the doctrinal changes in the Second Council of Vatican. Bishops in Latin America and emerging fields (Asia and Africa) also supported the Declaration on Religious Freedom. They believed that the Catholic Church was going to be stronger after the Declaration on Religious Freedom in the world because it could change the perception of those who consider the Catholic Church as an authoritarian institution.

According to Wilde, the legitimacy concern of bishops, which is derived from the critical pressure of Protestants, played an important role in the decision of progressive bishops since the elevation of the status of the Blessed Virgin Mary would have done damage to the relationship with Protestants and ended the dialogue with them. Therefore, progressive bishops did not support the elevation of the status of the Blessed Virgin Mary because of their emphasis on ecumenism.

On the other hand, for many lay Catholics, the Catholic Church's ban on birth control was more important than the Church's approach to religious freedom and the status of the Blessed Virgin Mary. However, even if some bishops supported to relax the Church's ban on contraception, both conservative and progressive bishops generally were reluctant to make a change in the position of the Church toward birth control because it was seen as an internal issue. Thus, Wilde points out that an external threat that leading to the rise of concern about the legitimacy of the Catholic Church in the early 1960s were much more important than the concern of ordinary Catholics.

Wilde provides useful insights about religious change; however, her study has weaknesses and strengths. One major drawback is that Wilde reaches her findings by examining three cases although a large number of issues were revised in Vatican II. How about other changes in Vatican II? Do they also support her views about religious change? In her study, Wilde does not take other changes into consideration; therefore, her study is unable to demonstrate that her views are supported by other changes that occurred in Vatican II.

Wilde claims that she offers a theory of religious change. However, it has serious weaknesses to explain religious change in non-Catholic contexts because of her concentration on the organizational strategies of Catholic bishops. Internal structure of many religious traditions is very different from the Roman Catholic Church. While the Roman Catholic Church has the institution of papacy and authority of the Church (or Councils) over the interpretation of religious teachings, believers in many religious traditions such as Islam and Protestantism are able to establish their own interpretation of religious texts. For example, unlike Catholicism, in Islam and Protestantism, no one can speak in the name of God and has authority over the interpretation of religious teachings. Wilde's emphasis on the organizational strategies of bishops is helpful to understand religious change in Vatican II; however, it is meaningless in order to account for religious change in many religious traditions.

One of the most important contributions of Wilde's findings is to challenge "the supply-side paradigm," which is also called as "the new paradigm," "the religious market theory," and "the rational choice theory of religion." It has been a very effective theoretical approach to the social scientific study of religion for a few decades and provided new insights into religious change. In "the supply-side paradigm," religious groups are considered like economic firms that aim to maximize the number of their customers (believers) by marketing their products (religious beliefs and practices). As a result, the defenders of the supply-side paradigm suggest that religious diversity leads to religious change because religious groups reform their beliefs and practices in accordance with the demand of customers in a religiously diverse/competitive market to get more customers. However, Wilde shows that in Vatican II, the concern about institutional legitimacy is more important than satisfying the demands of ordinary believers. Wilde shows that bishops did not prioritize the issue of birth control although it is an important issue for lay Catholics because bishops

did not perceive it as a serious threat to the legitimacy of the Church in the world. Thus, the results in Vatican II could not be predicted by “the supply-side paradigm,” which argues that the concern of believers is more important than other concerns for bishops or religious leaders in the religious market.

Briefly, Wilde argues that religious institutions sometimes do not compete with each other, but seek legitimacy in the world. The emphasis on the legitimacy concern of religions in understanding religious change is the most important contribution of her study and can be helpful in understanding religious change in many parts of the world. As a result, Wilde’s study is strongly recommended those who are interested in the history of Christianity, Vatican II, and religious change.

