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Robert L. Bloom
Gettysburg College

Basil L. Crapster
Gettysburg College

Harold A. Dunkelberger
Gettysburg College

See next page for additional authors

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6. Catholic Revival and Counter Reformation

Abstract

Contemporary with Luther and Calvin, there were once again powerful constructive forces at work within the Roman Catholic church. A reformed and rededicated papacy, a revived and purified clergy, a militant spearhead in the Jesuits, and an unequivocal statement of doctrine at the Council of Trent not only contained and turned back the Protestant tide, but also helped the Roman Catholic church become once more a dynamic force in Western Civilization. What happened in the Roman Catholic West during the sixteenth century has frequently been called the Counter Reformation. This term is not altogether accurate, since Catholic revival was only partially inspired by the Protestant movement, and only a portion of its effort was directed against Protestantism. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Contemporary Civilization, Christianity, Church, Catholicism, Protestant Reformation, Roman Catholic Church

Disciplines

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Comments

This is a part of [Section VII: The Protestant Movement](#). The [Contemporary Civilization](#) page lists all additional sections of *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, as well as the [Table of Contents](#) for both volumes.

More About Contemporary Civilization:

From 1947 through 1969, all first-year Gettysburg College students took a two-semester course called Contemporary Civilization. The course was developed at President Henry W.A. Hanson's request with the goal of "introducing the student to the backgrounds of contemporary social problems through the major concepts, ideals, hopes and motivations of western culture since the Middle Ages."

Gettysburg College professors from the history, philosophy, and religion departments developed a textbook for the course. The first edition, published in 1955, was called *An Introduction to Contemporary Civilization and Its Problems*. A second edition, retitled *Ideas and Institutions of Western Man*, was published in 1958 and 1960. It is this second edition that we include here. The copy we digitized is from the Gary T. Hawbaker '66 Collection and the marginalia are his.

Authors

Robert L. Bloom, Basil L. Crapster, Harold A. Dunkelberger, Charles H. Glatfelter, Richard T. Mara, Norman E. Richardson, and W. Richard Schubart

6. Catholic Revival and Counter Reformation

Contemporary with Luther and Calvin, there were once again powerful constructive forces at work within the Roman Catholic church. A reformed and rededicated papacy, a revived and purified clergy, a militant spearhead in the Jesuits, and an unequivocal statement of doctrine at the Council of Trent not only contained and turned back the Protestant tide, but also helped the Roman Catholic church become once more a dynamic force in Western Civilization. What happened in the Roman Catholic West during the sixteenth century has frequently been called the Counter Reformation. This term is not altogether accurate, since Catholic revival was only partially inspired by the Protestant movement, and only a portion of its effort was directed against Protestantism.

There were three important and related developments in the dramatic success of the Catholic revival. First, there was a renewed piety exhibited particularly in several new religious orders, of which the Jesuits were the most important. Second, there was a clearly enunciated change of administrative practice and a redefinition of doctrine. Third, there was the powerful political influence of several Catholic states directed at furthering the cause of the Roman church.

The revival in Catholic piety was chiefly an Italian and Spanish phenomenon. Early in the sixteenth century there appeared in Italy groups known as Oratories of Divine Love, in which clergy and laity, humanists and scholastics, united in renewing the Catholic faith. They believed that the improvement of society should begin with the individual and that he should prepare himself by prayer, frequent use of the sacraments, and acts of charity. There was a similar trend among some of the old orders and several new ones were founded, as the medieval reform device of monasticism reasserted itself. The Capuchians, an order of friars begun about 1520, sought to exemplify fully the rule of St. Francis. Their most important work was preaching and ministering to the poor, especially in times of disaster, first in Italy but later throughout Catholic Europe. The Ursulines, an order for women founded in 1535, were highly successful in educating girls and helping the needy. The Oratorians, a congregation of secular priests (1575), cultivated interest in high standards of religious literature and music. The great reformer of Catholic church music was Giovanni Palestrina (1526-1594), whose revised setting for the mass became such a

Capuchians.

model that the Council of Trent was dissuaded from acting on the proposal to banish music from the churches.

Spain, perhaps even more than Italy, was the center of a renewed Catholic piety. Here Renaissance humanism had left scarcely a mark. The monarchy had successfully identified religious orthodoxy and national unity in the effort to expel the Moslems. In the late fifteenth century the scholarly and ascetic Franciscan, Cardinal Ximenes (1436-1517), confessor of Queen Isabella, used his great influence in the interests of reform. His efforts, coupled with the activities of the Inquisition, help explain why Spain remained almost wholly free of Protestantism. It is estimated that by 1600 the secular and regular clergy numbered about one fourth of the entire population and that the church owned about one half of the land. Mysticism made a profound appeal to the Spanish temperament, especially in the person of St. Theresa (1515-1582), a Carmelite nun. The reports of her numerous visions of the Christ and her desire to observe strictly all the rules of the order brought spirited criticism, but did not deter her from founding a new order and from organizing about thirty convents and monasteries.

Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), along with St. Theresa, represents the flowering of Spanish piety. An adventuresome knight, he turned his own battle wounds into a great opportunity to serve the Catholic cause. While waiting for his mangled leg to heal, he spent much time in reading and meditating on the lives of Christ and the saints. At length he experienced a vision of the Virgin and her Child, an event which marked the beginning of his conversion (1521-1522). He cleansed his soul by confession and penance, gave his fine clothes to a beggar, donned the coarse robe of the pilgrim, and pledged himself to perpetual chastity and poverty. In 1523 he made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, but the Franciscans there refused his request to remain as a missionary to the Moslems. Back in Spain, he devoted his energies to learning Latin and philosophy, and he began to instruct others. But the activities of this former knight aroused opposition. What right had he to teach? On several occasions he was tried by the Inquisition, imprisoned for his audacity, and released only on condition that he would submit himself to intensive training before he taught again. He finally made his way to Paris, where he begged in the streets for food and for tuition at the university.

It was here at Paris that Loyola gathered around himself six intensely sincere men who, with him, constituted the nucleus of the Society of Jesus. In 1534 they took personal vows of poverty and chastity, determining to become missionaries to the Holy Land or, failing that, obedient servants of the pope. After several attempts to reach the East came to naught, they drew up a rule and offered themselves to the pope, who recognized the order, consisting then of ten men, in 1540.

There was a great difference between the result of the order built on a type of military order. He didn't know what to do. special obedience to the papacy. troops of the papacy.

conversion experience of Loyola and his contemporary, Luther. Loyola was convinced that the human will, damaged though it had been by the fall, was nevertheless capable of performing good works with the help of the church. These works, for Loyola, depended upon a rigorous discipline. To train and guide his companions, he proposed to show how they, like he, could control the impulses of body and mind by a trained will. The method was the spiritual exercise. This new religious technique involved a vivid but controlled imagination which could bring the vision of Christ triumphant. As early as 1525 he set down his method in the Spiritual Exercises, which was one of the most influential writings of the century. Passing through several elaborations before reaching its final form about 1550, it became a basic guide for the Jesuits, as the Society of Jesus soon came to be called. The following brief excerpt from the Spiritual Exercises illustrates one facet of that guide -- unquestioning obedience and loyalty to the church:

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The rapidly growing Jesuit Order, which numbered over a thousand members at Loyola's death, was by then committed to restoring the Roman Catholic church to a supreme position in spiritual power and temporal influence. This it proposed to accomplish through an organization disciplined along rigidly military lines which concentrated on education, missionary activities, and political influence. The Jesuits emphasized secondary and higher education. In content and method, their instruction was emphatically Thomist. Jesuit schools became the envy of Europe in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Their quality

* The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius..., trans. Louis J. Puhl (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1954), pp. 157-161. Used with permission.

led Francis Bacon to declare: "Such as they are, would they were ours." Jesuit missionaries traveled to the Orient and to the New World. One of the original members of the society, Francis Xavier (1506-1552), worked in India, Japan, and China. The Jesuits pressed world missions for a century and a half before anything comparable was attempted by the Protestants. Finally, the Jesuits displayed outstanding ability in gaining and exploiting political influence in Europe. Coupled with their educational efforts and their undoubted devotion, their diplomacy guided the counterattack which won back from Protestantism much of southern Germany, most of Hungary and Bohemia, and Poland.

The second major development in the Catholic revival was a change in administrative practice and a redefinition of doctrine, which culminated in the calling of the first general church council since the failure of the Conciliar Movement in the preceding century. The reform movement within the Roman Catholic church did not finally capture the papacy until the pontificate of Paul III (1534-1549). Paul's personal inclinations would have made of him another Renaissance pope, but he sensed both the need for reform and the sentiment in that direction then developing in the Roman church. He began naming men of approved piety to high office as cardinals and bishops. They in turn brought upon their subordinates the pressure or renewed spiritual and moral zeal. Paul reintroduced the Inquisition into Italy (1542) and established a censorship (1543). Early in his pontificate he appointed a commission of cardinals to investigate conditions in the church. He hoped to avoid any possibility of repeating the conciliar fiasco of the preceding century by handling himself those matters which absolutely needed reform. But the report of the commission (1537) helped convince him that a general council was unavoidable. Meanwhile, the emperor was urging him to call such a gathering for another reason. He hoped that it might be the means of healing the religious divisions in Germany.

After several postponements the council convened at Trent in 1545. The first sessions lasted until 1547. A second series convened in 1551 and ended the following year. The final sessions lasted from 1562 to 1563. From the very beginning it was obvious that the papacy was in complete control of the council, which was heavily weighted with Italian members and managed by the Jesuits. All of the council's declarations had to be approved by the pope. The few Protestants who attended some early sessions at the request of the emperor soon found that compromise on the questions dividing them and the Roman Catholics was impossible, since the papacy was determined to reassert the Catholic position on all of the basic doctrines in dispute and hoped finally to gain imperial help in extirpating the Protestant heresy. The council continued after the Germans effected their own compromise at Augsburg (1555), largely because the pope wished to forestall similar national arrangements elsewhere.

While administrative reform and redefinition of dogma were

preaching, gaining powers of court preaching and as rather confessors of the rulers. not much success in England.

taken up alternately in the council sessions, the latter received by far the greater attention. The challenge of Protestantism required sharper definitions than ever had been necessary in the Church of the Middle Ages. The council had to define even more carefully than before the relation between Scripture and tradition, and between faith and reason; the sacramental system; the proper use of relics and indulgences. It has been stated that Catholicism as a religion of infallible authority dates in practice from the Council of Trent where, along with the Bible and papal decretals, the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas was placed on the altar. The compromises of the Renaissance papacy were at an end; the response to Protestantism was unequivocal and uncompromising. The selection which follows is The Profession of the Tridentine Faith, which was formulated by the papacy in 1564 at the request of the Council of Trent as a summary of the dogmas which it affirmed. It has been the basic confession required of Roman Catholic bishops and converts:

I. I, _____, with a firm faith believe and profess all and every one of the things contained in that creed which the holy Roman Church makes use of:

'I believe in one God, the Father Almighty,' etc. [Here follows the Nicene Creed.]

II. I most steadfastly admit and embrace apostolic and ecclesiastic traditions, and all other observances and constitutions of the same Church.

III. I also admit the holy Scriptures, according to that sense which our holy mother Church has held and does hold, to which it belongs to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Scriptures; neither will I ever take and interpret them otherwise than according to the unanimous consent of the Fathers.

IV. I also profess that there are truly and properly seven sacraments of the new law, instituted by Jesus Christ our Lord, and necessary for the salvation of mankind, though not all for every one, to wit: baptism, confirmation, the eucharist, penance, extreme unction, holy orders, and matrimony; and that they confer grace; and that of these, baptism, confirmation, and ordination can not be reiterated without sacrilege. I also receive and admit the received and approved ceremonies of the Catholic Church, used in the solemn administration of the aforesaid sacraments.

V. I embrace and receive all and every one of the things which have been defined and declared in the holy Council of Trent concerning original sin and justification.

VI. I profess, likewise, that in the mass there is offered to God a true, proper, and propitiatory sacrifice for the living and the dead; and that in the most holy sacrament of the eucharist there is truly, really, and substantially, the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ; and that there is made a change of the whole essence of the bread into the body, and of the whole essence of the wine into the blood; which

rigidity & obedience

change the Catholic Church calls transubstantiation.

VII. I also confess that under either kind alone Christ is received whole and entire, and a true sacrament.

VIII. I firmly hold that there is a purgatory, and that the souls therein detained are helped by the suffrages of the faithful. Likewise, that the saints reigning with Christ are to be honored and invoked, and that they offer up prayers to God for us, and that their relics are to be had in veneration.

IX. I most firmly assert that the images of Christ, and of the perpetual Virgin the Mother of God, and also of other saints, ought to be had and retained, and that due honor and veneration are to be given them. I also affirm that the power of indulgences was left by Christ in the Church, and that the use of them is most wholesome to Christian people.

X. I acknowledge the holy Catholic Apostolic Roman Church for the mother and mistress of all churches, and I promise and swear true obedience to the Bishop of Rome, successor to St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles, and Vicar of Jesus Christ.

XI. I likewise undoubtingly receive and profess all other things delivered, defined, and declared by the Sacred Canons and General Councils, and particularly by the holy Council of Trent; and I condemn, reject, and anathematize all things contrary thereto, and all heresies which the Church has condemned, rejected, and anathematized.

XII. I do, at this present, freely profess and truly hold this true Catholic faith, without which no one can be saved; and I promise most constantly to retain and confess the same entire and inviolate, with God's assistance, to the end of my life. And I will take care, as far as in me lies, that it shall be held, taught, and preached by my subjects, or by those the care of whom shall appertain to me in my office. This I promise, vow, and swear -- so help me God, and these holy Gospels of God. *

While doctrinal formulation was the chief accomplishment of the Council of Trent, many of the reforms which it suggested were carried out in subsequent years by papal authority. The papal bureaucracy was reorganized. A seminary was ordered established in every diocese to provide a better education for the clergy. Decrees reaffirmed the doctrine of clerical celibacy and limited the secular activities of bishops. Simony and pluralism were condemned. The Tridentine Catechism was prepared (1566); the missal and prayer book were revised, with more readings from Scripture added; and a corrected edition of the Vulgate was published. The Inquisition was continued, as was censorship in the form of an Index of books which Catholics were

* Philip Schaff, The Creeds of Christendom (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1919), II, 207-210. Used with permission.

no theological concessions to the Protestants.

forbidden to read. While the church continued to uphold the indulgence, it decreed that henceforth it, and the sacraments, were to be free. The Council of Trent had decided that error should be eliminated from art. In line with this, nude figures in Renaissance paintings were draped appropriately and, as we have seen, the Inquisition ordered Paolo Veronese to make such changes in his painting as would bring it into line with the accepted canons of taste.

The success of the Catholic revival required more than papal support. Rome has reasserted its spiritual independence of Protestantism and the state, but now it needed the help of Catholic princes to combat Protestant heresy and enforce reform in their realms. Into the hands of such rulers as Philip II of Spain (1556-1598) and Emperor Ferdinand I (1556-1564) the Roman church placed a large measure of the responsibility for beating back its enemies. The Jesuits always stood ready to assist in these efforts and then to advise secular rulers in matters of education, relations with the papacy, and preferment for Catholic officials.

By 1600 the Roman Catholic church, although stripped of important areas from which it had once received strong support, was in many ways in a stronger position than it had been a century earlier. Europe was then in the midst of a series of religious wars the outcome of which would determine whether some of the areas which had been lost and not yet recovered might still be won back into the fold. It is instructive to note that Catholicism had prepared for this contest in part by defining its doctrine more dogmatically than ever before in a way reminiscent of similar developments which we have noted in the Lutheran, Calvinist, and Anglican faiths.

Began before Reformation, but added zeal afterwards. use of power of the military states