

Church History

Lesson 33 - The Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation

Introduction

- Over the past year we have looked at the Protestant Reformation in depth.
- How did the Roman Catholic Church respond to the Reformation? How did they respond theologically? In church structure and practice? In piety and practice?

1. Roman Catholic Reformation Movements Prior to the Reformation

- 1.1.** The Reformation was the first attempt to reform faith and practice within the Roman Catholic Church. As we have seen previously these had been going on throughout the history of the Church. Most of the monastic movements began as attempts to reform the practices - and sometimes the doctrines - of the Church. Furthermore, there had been successions of calls for doctrinal changes from various quarters within the Church.
- 1.2.** As we had also seen in previous sessions, there had been increasing calls for reform in the years just prior to the Reformation. However, most of these had been limited to calls to increase piety, or to encourage holy living, but few had called for a major change in doctrine - which was the heart of the Reformation.
- 1.3.** In Spain, the Queen Isabella wanted to see reforms within the Church. She was a scholar herself, and surrounded herself with a great array of intellectuals. She also received the right to fill church posts to make sure church posts were given to serious individuals. (Her husband Ferdinand, however, received the same right, and he placed his 6-year old illegitimate son as an archbishop!)
- 1.4.** Isabella saw to it that her confessor, Francisco Jimenez de Cisneros, was appointed as the most important archbishop in all of Spain (Toledo). He was an austere Franciscan monk who had spent 10 years in prison rather than participate in the corrupt church practices around him. While in prison he had mastered Hebrew and Chaldean, and thus was a great scholar.
- 1.5.** Jimenez made two significant contributions. First, he founded the University of Alcalá, which produced many important scholars, leaders, and literary figures in Spanish life. Second, he oversaw the creation and publishing of the Complutensian Polyglot - a Bible with the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin text in columns. This had been produced by the finest Hebrew, Greek, and Latin scholars in Spain. It was completed in 1517, but not published until 1520. In its preface it said "this edition of the Bible that, at this critical time, opens the sacred sources of our religion, from which will flow a much purer theology than any derived from less direct sources." This sounds much like Luther!
- 1.6.** However, Isabella and Jimenez were anything but tolerant of any doctrinal changes. In fact, Cardinal Jiménez was also the Grand Inquisitor in the Spanish Inquisition. Gonzales notes "In this he was typical of most of the Catholic Reformation, which sought to purify the church through austerity, devotion, and scholarship, but at the same time insisted on strict adherence to traditional dogma. Most of the saints and sages of the Catholic Reformation, like Isabella, were pure, devout, and intolerant." (Gonzales, page 139 · Location 2263)
- 1.7.** However, it became apparent that such punishments alone were not enough to stop the spread of Protestantism. The Roman Catholic Church would have to answer the

teachings of the Protestant Reformers, as well as their charges of gross misconduct by the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church.

2. Approaches To Dealing with the Challenges of the Protestant Reformation

- 2.1.** The minority approach - the spirituali (open to Protestant ideas)
 - 2.1.1.** This group was led by Cardinal Gaspar Contarini and sought reconciliation with the Protestant Reformers. They agreed that there was need of reform in both doctrinal and moral areas. They wanted to see if dialogue could lead to an end to the split.
 - 2.1.2.** In the end, however, this group lost out, and the more strident position was taken.
- 2.2.** The dominant approach - the zelanti
 - 2.2.1.** This group also agreed that reform was needed, but believed the path to reform was to double down on traditional Roman Catholic beliefs and practices. Rather than seeking to attempt reconciliation with the Protestants, this group wanted to stress the disputed doctrines and practices even more.
 - 2.2.2.** This group won out within Rome, and by 1542, under Pope Paul IV, they launched a counter-offensive against the Protestants. This included traditional use of force through the Inquisition, but it also had three other prongs: banning books and writings deemed heretical; the new movement known as the Jesuits; and a church council to definitively declare the official position of the Roman Catholic Church.

3. The Index of Prohibited Books

- 3.1.** Pope Paul IV was concerned to protect the faith and morals of the faithful, so in 1559 he issued the first authorized list of prohibited books (Index Librorum Prohibitorum). (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4099-4101).
- 3.2.** A revised form (the Tridentine Index) was authorized at the Council of Trent. The index was aimed primarily at Protestants, but also encompassed dubious Catholics such as Erasmus. Perhaps the most startling prohibitions were the many editions of the Bible, as well as editions of the church fathers, unless granted special permission by bishops and Inquisitors. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4103-4104).
- 3.3.** This method attempted to suppress the spread of Protestantism by outlawing the possession of its writings, or even those that seemed to favor the Protestants out of Church history. However, this often had the opposite effect - people desired to see why such writings had been banned, thus increasing interest in them!

4. The Inquisition

- 4.1.** Inquisitional courts have a long history in the medieval church... With the emergence of Protestantism, the Spanish Inquisition turned its attention to ferreting out suspected Protestants and their sympathizers, which included Erasmian humanists. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4110-4111).
- 4.2.** Inquisitional courts have a long history in the medieval church... With the emergence of Protestantism, the Spanish Inquisition turned its attention to ferreting out suspected Protestants and their sympathizers, which included Erasmian humanists. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4110-4111).

- 4.3. Caraffa was appointed one of six General Inquisitors. He was so eager to activate his newly acquired inquisitional powers that he actually set up interrogation rooms in his own home. He once proclaimed, “If our own father were a heretic, we would carry the faggots to burn him!” (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Location 4117).
- 4.4. With Caraffa’s elevation to Peter’s chair as Pope Paul IV in 1555, the Roman Inquisition shifted into high gear. One recent scholar has noted that during Caraffa’s pontificate, the church fell “into the grip of a witch-hunting mentality.” (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4119-4121).

5. The Jesuits: Spiritual Soldiers for the Pope

- 5.1. Ignatius was born around 1491 in north Spain to an aristocratic family. He hoped to gain glory through a military career.
- 5.2. On May 20, 1521, while defending the city of Pamplona against the army of Francis I, his life was changed forever when a French cannonball shattered his right leg and injured the other leg. He endured several surgical operations, all without the benefit of anesthesia. While convalescing in his hometown of Loyola, Spain, he underwent a profound conversion experience. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4133-4135).
- 5.3. During his convalescence Ignatius turned to the reading of devotional books. This led him to take his faith much more seriously, and to turn from his former ideas of how he wanted to live his life.
- 5.4. This visualization technique or contemplation became a distinctive feature of Loyola’s famous book, *Spiritual Exercises*. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4138-4139).
- 5.5. After a year of rigorous asceticism and mystical experiences, he emerged with a clearer vision of how he would serve God, now as a soldier for Christ. He began writing down his insights, which became the basis for his *Spiritual Exercises*, although this work did not reach final form until 1541. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4143-4145).
- 5.6. Ironically, he was briefly imprisoned by the Spanish Inquisition, which suspected him of heresy. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4146-4147).
- 5.7. Ignatius then withdrew to Manresa, where he planned to live as a hermit. However, much like Luther, he was tormented by a strict conscience. Like Luther, he spent much time confessing sins, and not finding comfort. In fact, his despair was so great, he often thought of flinging himself through a hole near where he prayed so as to kill himself. However, realizing that this would be a sin he cried out “Lord, I shall do naught to offend thee.”
- 5.8. Like Luther, Ignatius says he eventually discovered the grace and mercy of God, and that he became certain that “our Lord had wished to free him by His mercy.” However, this discovery did not lead him to break with the Roman Catholic Church, but rather to offer himself to her as a loyal soldier for Christ and the RCC.
- 5.9. Initially, Ignatius went as a missionary to the Turks in the Holy Land. However, the Franciscans who were already there feared he would create trouble and sent him away. At this point Ignatius determined he must learn theology in order to better serve God. Consequently, he became a student at several universities.
- 5.10. During this time a small band began to gather around Ignatius, drawn by his fervent faith and commitment. In 1534, he returned to Montserrat with this band of followers, and they all took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience to the Pope.

This group included Francis Xavier, a missionary to Japan and India, and also Diego Lainez, who became an influential theologian at the Council of Trent, and also Ignatius' successor.

- 5.11. The initial purpose of the new order was to work among the Turks in the Holy Land. But by the time Pope Paul III gave it his formal approval, in 1540, the threat of Protestantism was such that the Society of Jesus— commonly known as the Jesuits — came to be one of the main instruments of the Catholic offensive against Protestantism. (Gonzales, page 144 · Location 2356)
- 5.12. The Jesuits, however, did not set aside their original missionary commitment, and soon hundreds of them were laboring in the Far East and the New World. (Gonzales, page 144 · Location 2357)
- 5.13. As Loyola envisioned the new society, it was to be an elite order organized along military lines and distinguished by its iron discipline and obedience to the papacy. They recruited only the most dedicated and gifted candidates. Ignatius insisted on an extremely high level of academic preparation. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4164-4166).
- 5.14. In the Jesuit Constitutions, Ignatius stressed that obedience to the pope must be *perinde ac cadaver* (“in the manner of a corpse”), which was Ignatius’s way of demanding absolute obedience. Even more striking was Rule 13 of the Spiritual Exercises: “If we wish to proceed securely in all things, we must hold fast to the following principle: What seems to me white, I will believe black, if the hierarchal church so defines.” (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4169-4172).
- 5.15. The Jesuits were often viewed as willing to do anything to further their goals. The unofficial Jesuit motto *Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam* (“ For the greater glory of God”) reflected the conviction that no act is evil if performed with the intention of bringing greater glory to God. Indeed, such actions are meritorious, even though outwardly they appear evil. The conviction that the ends justify the means was a hallmark of Jesuits and a key to their success. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4174-4178).
- 5.16. As the Jesuits developed, they concentrated on three primary activities. First, they established schools and universities throughout Europe. Second, they were committed to missionary activity abroad. Their third objective, which became preeminent, was to stop the advance of Protestantism. To a remarkable degree, the Jesuits were successful. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4178-4180).
- 5.17. Ignatius died in Rome on July 31, 1556, as a result of the “Roman fever,” a severe strain of malaria. Many of the details of his life and philosophy were dictated to his secretary, Gonçalves da Câmara, in his waning days. He was beatified by Pope Paul V on July 27, 1609, and canonized by Pope Gregory XV on March 13, 1622. Not surprisingly, Ignatius is venerated as the patron saint of Catholic soldiers. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4183-4186).
- 5.18. As a response to Protestantism, the Society of Jesus was a powerful weapon in the hands of a reformed papacy. Their organization, patterned after the military, enabled them to respond rapidly and efficiently to various challenges and opportunities. Many of them were also scholars who contributed their knowledge to the polemic against Protestantism. (Gonzales, page 146 · Location 2366)

6. The Council of Trent

- 6.1. Luther and other Reformers had called for a council of the church to be called. However, political and historical complications made this difficult. Politically, the great rivalry between Emperor Charles and Philip of Spain made such a council difficult and risky. Historically, Popes feared such a council would revive the conciliar movement of the past. This was also a time where many of the Popes were far less interested in spiritual and religious ideas than political and worldly power.
- 6.2. The brief pontificate of Adrian VI offered some hope of reformation. He was a man of lofty ideals who did indeed wish to reform the church. But the intrigues of the curia thwarted most of his projects, which in any case were cut short by his unexpected death. The next pope, Clement VII, was a cousin of Leo X, and his policies were similar to those of his kinsman. Although he did succeed in his plans for the beautification of Rome, his pontificate was disastrous for the Roman church, for it was during his time that England declared itself independent of papal authority, and the troops of Charles V sacked Rome. Paul III, who succeeded Clement, remained an ambiguous figure. He seemed to trust astrology more than theology, and his papacy, like those of his predecessors, was tainted by nepotism: his son was made duke of Parma and Piacenza, and his teenage grandsons were made cardinals. He too wished to make Rome the wealthiest center of Renaissance art, and for that reason continued the systems of exploitation whereby the papacy sought to collect funds from all nations in Europe. But he was also a reforming pope. He was the one who gave official recognition to the Jesuits and began employing them in missions and in polemics against Protestantism. (Gonzales, page 146 · Location 2379)
- 6.3. However, Paul III did eventually call for a council, which first met in Trent (in Italy) in 1545. However, this council was unusual from the beginning. Though it was counted by the Roman Catholic Church as the 19th Ecumenical Council of the Church, it only had 31 prelates in the first session. Even by the time of the final session, only 213 prelates were in attendance. Furthermore, due to political considerations the council kept going into recess. In fact, although it officially met from 1545 to 1563, most of that time was spent in recess! Finally, while most church councils dealt with very defined and specific questions, Trent felt compelled to deal with the broad range of questions raised by the Protestant Reformation, and to also deal with issues regulating the life and worship of the Roman Catholic Church.
- 6.4. Nonetheless, the Council of Trent became a central facet of the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation. It served to define Roman Catholic doctrine and practice for centuries to come. The following sections will deal with the major decisions of the Council of Trent.
- 6.5. **Scripture and Tradition -**
 - 6.5.1. The first phase of Trent was particularly significant, since it was during those sessions that the more important work was done. One of the most disputed issues between Protestants and Catholics centered on authority. Luther famously coined the phrase sola scriptura to indicate that the Bible is the final authority, not the church or its councils. Trent responded by affirming two sources of authority — Scripture and Tradition: The council ... accepts and venerates all the books of both the Old and New Testament ..., it also accepts and venerates traditions concerned with faith and morals as has having been received orally from Christ or inspired by the Holy Spirit and continuously preserved in the Catholic church. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4240-4244).

6.5.2. Along with its affirmation of the authority of Scripture and Tradition, Trent declared the Latin Vulgate (along with the Apocrypha) as the only authorized version of the Bible. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4245-4246).

6.6. Justification

6.6.1. It was also in the first phase, during 1546– 47, that Trent devoted its sixth session to the issue so close to Luther’s heart, the doctrine of justification. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4246-4248).

6.6.2. Perhaps one of the most surprising aspects of Trent was the presence of high-ranking theologians who were somewhat open to Luther’s new doctrine. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4252-4253).

6.6.3. In one of the remarkable moments of the council, Cardinal Pole, who was a presiding papal legate, excused himself at a crucial moment of the debate on justification and did not vote. Pole, whose own views were sympathetic to Luther, had seen the writing on the wall and realized that the conservatives would not allow any concessions on this matter, so he feigned illness so that he did not have to register a vote. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4257-4259).

6.6.4. Canon 9 states rather unequivocally, “If anyone says that a sinful man is justified by faith alone ... let him be anathema.” Canon 11 adds, “If anyone says that men are justified either through the imputation of Christ’s justice [righteousness] alone, or through the remission of sins alone ... let him be anathema.” (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4263-4266).

6.6.5. In general terms, Catholics and Protestants used the term “justification” to mean different things. It is clear that both Trent and Protestants affirm legal justification and moral sanctification — that is, the sinner is saved by grace through faith in Christ (justification), and sinners must live godly lives (sanctification) through the internal power of the Holy Spirit. However, the fundamental difference lies in the fact that Trent understands this term to include both legal justification and moral sanctification, while Protestants restrict the term to legal justification only. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4269-4273).

6.7. Sacraments

6.7.1. It was during the second phase that Trent fully addressed the crucial matter of the sacraments. It had earlier affirmed the traditional seven sacraments rather than two (baptism and Eucharist) as Protestants claimed with regard to canon 1 of the seventh session, stating, “If anyone says that ... there are more or less than seven [sacraments] ... let them be anathema.” (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4279-4280).

6.7.2. The doctrine of transubstantiation. Trent would brook no modification on this point and firmly reasserted that when the bread and wine are consecrated, “a change is brought about of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ and of the whole substance of the wine into the blood of Christ. This change the Holy Catholic Church properly ... calls transubstantiation.” (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4281-4284).

6.7.3. it declared ... that there are seven sacraments; that the mass is a true sacrifice that can be offered for the benefit of the deceased; that communion in both kinds— that is, with the laity receiving both the bread and the wine— is not necessary

6.8. Ecclesial Reform

6.8.1. The third and final phase of Trent was attended by some two hundred bishops from nearly every corner of Christendom. But all was not well. Its last sessions (1562–63) were marred by bitter clashes between the Italian faction of the pope and the Spanish, who were suspicious of papal power. Tensions were so high that riots engulfed the city and blood was shed. The council itself ground to a halt for ten months (September 1562 to June 1563). In spite of the fracas, the council managed to get back on track and issued decrees affirming traditional doctrines of purgatory, intercession of saints, and indulgences. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4289-4293).

6.8.2. In the final sessions, the Tridentine theologians forbade nonresident bishops, the holding of multiple benefices, simony, the granting of abbeys in commendam as favors to wealthy laymen, and clerical sexual immorality, while at the same time stressing the need for more education for clergy and renewing devotional practices. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4295-4297).

6.9. The aftermath of Trent

6.9.1. The council ended by submitting its decrees to the pope for approval — an act that recognized his supremacy in the church and marked the defeat of any lingering conciliarism. When the Council of Trent had finished its work on December 4, 1563, all hope of reconciliation with the Protestants was gone and Christendom was now divided yet again. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Location 4299).

6.9.2. In spite of its checkered history, of the scant number of prelates who attended it, and of the resistance of many sovereigns who would not allow its decrees to be published in their territories, the Council of Trent marked the birth of the modern Catholic Church. (Gonzales, page 150 · Location 2426)

7. Other Aspects of the Roman Catholic Reformation

7.1. Pope Pius V (1566-1572)

7.1.1. Much of the new reforming energy derived its impetus from Pius V (1566–72). Instead of living in papal luxury, he remained an ascetic, living in a monastic cell, and was even known to walk barefoot through the streets of Rome. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4305-4307).

7.1.2. The Curia was reorganized, and serious measures were taken to eradicate simony and nepotism. The streets of Rome were cleared of prostitutes. And in a decision that would have a lasting theological effect, Pius V elevated Thomas Aquinas to a Doctor of the Church in 1567, republished his *Summa Theologiae*, and required Catholic universities to teach Thomism exclusively. Aquinas was to become the heavy artillery in the theological warfare of the centuries that followed. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4310-4311).

7.1.3. Pius was relentless in resisting Catholic reticence and Protestant opposition. When Emperor Maximilian II contemplated concessions to Protestants in Germany, Pius threatened excommunication. When the Queen of Sweden partook of Communion in both kinds, she was excommunicated. When Queen Elizabeth I did not return England to the Roman fold, she too was excommunicated. (Woodbridge and James, Kindle Locations 4313-4316).

- 7.2. Spiritual reforms in the Roman Catholic Church**
- 7.2.1.** Teresa of Avila was a young woman who (against her fathers wishes) joined the Carmelite convent of the Incarnation just outside Avila.
- 7.2.2.** Her wit and charm made her so popular that it became a fad for the aristocracy of the city to visit and exchange pleasantries with her. But she herself was unhappy with this easy style of monasticism, and spent as much time as possible reading books of devotion. (Gonzales, page 141 · Location 2299)
- 7.2.3.** She was dismayed when the Inquisition published a list of forbidden books that included most of her favorites. She then had a vision in which Jesus told her: “Fear not, for I shall be to you like an open book.” From then on, such visions became increasingly frequent. This led her into a prolonged inner struggle, for she had no way of determining whether the visions were genuine or, in her words, “it was a demon.” (Gonzales, page 141 · Location 2303)
- 7.2.4.** Finally, with the help of some learned friars, she came to the conviction that her visions were genuine. She then felt called, again by a vision, to leave the convent and found another one nearby, in order to follow the monastic life with more rigor there. (Gonzales, page 141 · Location 2306)
- 7.2.5.** But this was not enough, for her visions called her to found similar houses throughout Spain. Her enemies accused her of being a gadabout. But she won the respect of bishops and royalty, and eventually the order she founded spread throughout Spain and its possessions. Since her nuns wore sandals instead of shoes, they became generally known as the Discalced (or Barefoot) Carmelites. (Gonzales, page 141 · Location 2309)
- 7.2.6.** She was joined in her efforts by John of the Cross— later known as St. John of the Cross— a man so short that, when she met him, St. Teresa is said to have quipped, “Lord, I asked you for a monk and you sent me half of one.” The two became close friends and collaborators and, through John’s work, Teresa’s reform resulted in the male branch of the Discalced Carmelites. Thus, Teresa is the only woman in the history of the church to have founded monastic orders for both women and men. (Gonzales, page 142 · Location 2316)
- 7.2.7.** St John of the Cross also labored to see reform in the church, which led to much suffering, which gave rise to his famous phrase “the dark night of the soul.”
- 7.2.8.** Teresa “spent time in mystical contemplation, which often led to visions or to ecstasy. Her many works on the subject have become classics of mystical devotion and, in 1970, Pope Paul VI added her name to the official list of “Doctors of the Church”— an honor she shares with one other woman, St. Catherine of Siena, and also with St. John of the Cross.” (Gonzales, page 142 · Location 2319)
- 7.2.9.** The writings of Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross are still used by many as devotional aids.
- 7.3. The Douay-Rheims Study Bible**
- 7.3.1.** Although the Vulgate was considered the official Bible of Rome by Trent, translations into other languages did begin to appear.
- 7.3.2.** The Douay-Rheims Bible is an important example of this. It stands out in at least two important respects. First, it was a study Bible, the Roman Catholic

Church's answer to translations such as the Geneva Bible. Second, it was translated from the Vulgate - not the original Greek and Hebrew. Thus it was faithful to the doctrine established at Trent regarding the Vulgate as the official Bible of the Roman Church.

7.3.3. This Bible is an important example of how the Roman-Catholic Counter-Reformation sometimes employed the ideas and methods of the Reformation while maintaining the official doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church.

8. The Aftermath of the Reformation and the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation

- 8.1.** By the time of the close of the Council of Trent the rift between Protestants and the Roman Catholic Church was obviously permanent. The doctrines and practices of these groups were solidified and quite distinct. They could not co-exist in on organizational structure.
- 8.2.** Furthermore, the differences were declared to be of utmost importance. In the language of Trent, those who held other positions were considered anathema - accursed to hell. This left no room for reconciliation without one side abandoning its positions and admitting it had been wrong.
- 8.3.** Although Protestants had initially swept across much of Europe, the Counter-Reformation saw a number of areas return to the Roman Catholic fold. Eventually, however, armed conflicts broke out between Protestant and Roman Catholic realms. This conflict was known as the Thirty Years War, and it had a lasting impact on Europe.

Next Class: The 17th Century

Reading: Chapters 15-18

Date: March 24