



REFORMATION, CATHOLIC. In their attempts to characterize the nature of early modern Catholicism, historians have utilized the terms “Counter-Reformation” and “Catholic Reformation,” which convey different understandings of the church’s attempts at reform in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The former term views religious renewal within Catholicism as a reaction against the challenges posed by the Protestant reformers. Consequently, the Counter-Reformation is understood as repressive, seeking to reemphasize Catholic dogma, to reassert Catholic liturgical life, and to win back those who accepted the Protestant faith. Catholic Reformation highlights the existence of a spontaneous reform within the church itself that sought to revitalize religious life through the improvement and application of Gospel teachings to the life of both the individual and the institution. This movement predates Martin Luther and represents the culmination of medieval reform efforts. The goal of the Catholic Reformation was to reform the existing institutional church by fostering a renewal of its spiritual life and mission.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ORIGINS

Within Protestant scholarship, the term “Reformation” had, by the seventeenth century, become part of the vocabulary of historians. Consequently, Protestant historians began to look at sixteenth-century Catholicism from this perspective. The term “Counter-Reformation” was used for the first time by a Lutheran legal historian, Johann Stephan Pütter (1725–1807) in 1776 in his edition of

the Augsburg Confession. By this phrase, Pütter meant the forced return of Lutherans to Catholicism in those regions that had accepted the Lutheran confession. As a result, the Counter-Reformation was associated with military and political measures utilized by Catholic princes against the German Lutherans. The term came into general historical use in the nineteenth century with Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), whose use of the term suggested a unity within Catholicism that he saw emerging after 1555 from the Council of Trent, the Jesuits, and the papacy.

The term “Catholic Reformation” also originated within Protestantism. In 1880 the Lutheran Wilhelm Maurenbrecher (1838–1892) spoke of a Catholic Reformation when describing the various efforts at reform within the late medieval church. This understanding of Catholicism was given currency by Ludwig von Pastor (1854–1928), who demonstrated that Catholic reform was a spontaneous and independent movement, accelerated but not caused by Protestantism, because it arose and consolidated itself in areas where there was no religious dissent to react against.

Thus, the terms “Counter-Reformation” and “Catholic Reformation” derive from contrasting interpretations of the same historical process, and were often used to the exclusion of the other. This changed with the historian Hubert Jedin (1900–1980) who, in 1946, sought to bring some order to the debate over terminology. For Jedin, Catholicism in the sixteenth century could only be properly understood by utilizing both “Counter-Reforma-

tion” and “Catholic Reformation.” Catholic Reformation not only predated the Counter-Reformation but also for Jedin was its animating and motivating force. Jedin holds that the Catholic revival of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries sprang from two sources—the Council of Trent (which gave legislative form to reform) and the struggle against Protestantism (embodied in the work of the Jesuits). He calls the former “Catholic Reform” and the latter “Counter Reform.” However, they ought not to be seen as two separate realities, since Jedin sees them as closely interwoven in their historical evolution. Jedin considers the Council of Trent (1545–1563) and the Jesuits as much a part of the Catholic Reformation as they are of the Counter-Reformation. While the Catholic Reformation arose independently of Protestantism, Jedin also contends that it only won over the papacy and prevailed after Luther’s challenge, which awakened the leaders of the church to the urgency of reform. Consequently, the Catholic Reformation was able to extend itself throughout the church because it became in part a Counter-Reformation.

While Jedin’s understanding of these terms remains standard, the debate continues, giving rise to new terminology such as “Tridentine Reformation,” “Confessional Catholicism,” and most recently, “Early Modern Catholicism” advanced by John O’Malley.

THE NATURE OF CATHOLIC REFORM

At the end of the Middle Ages, the church was, institutionally and spiritually, in a state of decline. Corruption and abuse had set in on all levels—unworthy men held office in the church; politics came to dominate the papacy; bishops did not reside in their dioceses; priests were uneducated; monastic discipline was lax. It was clear that the church was in urgent need of reform, yet the cry for a “reformation in head and members” went unanswered “from above.” There was, however, a movement for reform “from below” led by individuals who sought not rebellion but restoration. These reformers, scattered throughout Europe, did not desire to inaugurate a new way but rather to return to the origins of the Christian religion. Regardless of the form that these individual efforts took, the aim was the spiritual renewal of the individual and the purification of the church. Thus, the Catholic

Reformation would be marked by reformed congregations of the leading monastic and mendicant orders; reform-minded bishops who resided in their dioceses personally looking after the religious lives of their flock; and groups of clergy and laity devoted to personal sanctification and the works of mercy.

Noteworthy among the reformers of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century was Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros (1436–1517) of Spain. His reform efforts impacted the entire Iberian Peninsula. A member of the Franciscan order, Cisneros, from 1495 until his death in late 1517, restored discipline and enhanced the quality of the Spanish church. He enjoined his priests to high standards in their own lives, in caring for the souls entrusted to them, and in performing their duties to preach the gospel. The pastoral mission of the church was at the heart of his reform efforts. Cisneros, however, was not simply concerned with the immediate needs of the church, but rather recognized the importance of ensuring the future of the church by preparing its future leaders. Consequently, Cisneros founded the University of Alcalá de Henares in 1499 for the purpose of educating the clergy.

Italy also provides numerous examples of individuals who became leaders in the reform of the church. Foremost among these was the Venetian senator Gasparo Contarini (1483–1542), one of the most impressive personalities of the Catholic Reformation. He wrote several treatises calling for meaningful reforms and moral rejuvenation. His most significant treatise was *On the Office of Bishop* (1516). Based on patristic ideals, the first section of the treatise explained the virtues that a good bishop must possess, while the second illustrated how a bishop should conduct himself and carry out his duties. Contarini stressed the importance of residency for bishops and chastises bishops for neglecting their duty to preach.

Gian Matteo Giberti, bishop of Verona (1524–1543) embodied the ideas expressed in Contarini’s treatise. His diocesan reforms and his role as a conscientious bishop were his chief contributions to the reform movement. Giberti revived the pastoral mission of the bishop who personally dedicated himself to the care of souls. Giberti’s efforts led to a thorough renewal and reform of his diocese that proved

to be a model and inspiration for later bishops. In addition, his diocesan regulations regarding clerical life served as a model for many of the reform decrees of the Council of Trent.

Religious orders also experienced a renewal that restored them to their original pristine state. The Benedictine abbot Gregorio Cortese (1483–1548) initiated a program of renewal that rested on the principles and ideals of humanism. The Franciscans, under the inspiration of Matteo da Bascio (1495–1552), saw the emergence of the Capuchins, who sought to return to the primitive simplicity and poverty of St. Francis of Assisi, while also devoting themselves to the work of preaching the gospel and caring for the poor and the sick.

Several brotherhoods devoted to regulating and spiritualizing the lives of the laity and the clergy alike emerged in the early sixteenth century. The earliest and most important was the Oratory of Divine Love, founded in Genoa in 1497 by Ettore Vernazza (1470–1524), who had been influenced by the charitable work of St. Catherine of Genoa (1447–1510). The fundamental aim of the members of the Oratory was the inner renewal of the self through the practice of good works on behalf of others, such as the care of the sick and orphans. The example of a life rooted in charity would pave the way for the reform of the church, since such reform emerged from personal sanctification. The most significant offshoot of the Genoese Oratory was the Roman Oratory, founded sometime between 1514 and 1517, which has often been seen as the initiation of effective Catholic reform within the church. This group dedicated itself to combating the abuses which had developed in Rome. The Roman Oratory gave birth in 1524 to the Theatine Order, priests who lived in community under a rule but also undertook an active apostolate.

The most significant of the new religious orders to emerge at this time was the Society of Jesus, founded by Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556). It was never the intention of Ignatius, nor the aim of the society itself, to defend the Catholic cause against Protestantism, although they did become involved in combating its spread. Rather, it was Ignatius's aim to provide a spiritual ideal and method capable of changing lives that would bring about the personal reform of the individual. Based on his own

experience of conversion, Ignatius hoped to effect a similar change of heart in others. The Jesuits sought to work for the advancement of souls in Christian life and doctrine wherever the need arose. Upon their approval in 1540 by Paul III (1534–1559), the Jesuits became involved in numerous religious and scholarly activities, all of which reflected a highly active spirituality. Some were missionaries, others theologians, still others school teachers, yet all sought to live a religious life based on an interior conversion to Christ and active service in his name.

Of equal importance was the founding of the Company of St. Ursula in 1535 by Angela Merici (1474–1540). Concerned primarily with the education of young girls, the Ursulines were the first teaching order of women to be established. While the nuns observed the canonical hours and took vows of chastity and obedience, they were not cloistered and often taught in the homes of their pupils. After Angela's death, the papacy introduced changes within the Ursulines, first requiring the nuns to wear a habit and second imposing enclosure. Nevertheless, Angela Merici set the pattern for the future education of young girls within the church.

PAPALLY SPONSORED REFORM

While the spontaneous reform "from below" was fruitful, its impact was limited. The scattered efforts of individual bishops, clerics, and laity were unable to effect a general reform of the church, which would only occur with coordination "from above." In order for any reform effort "from above" to be truly effective, the head had to play a dynamic role. A pope was needed who would lead the reform movement himself. Many believed that Leo X (1513–1521), whose election was greeted with a renewed sense of hope by those desirous of reform, would be such a pope. He reconvened the Fifth Lateran Council (1512–1517), begun by his predecessor, which represented the last major effort at reform within the church prior to the Reformation. However, the decrees of the council failed to initiate any effective reform because of Leo X's lack of enthusiasm in their implementation.

In 1522 hope for a reform movement led by the papacy was rekindled with the election of Adrian VI. Adrian saw his task of initiating reform as a pastoral obligation intimately connected with his apostolic

office. Unfortunately, Adrian died in 1523 before any effective reform could be initiated. His successor, Clement VII (1523–1534), spent most of his pontificate trying to avoid summoning a General Council, which was increasingly being called for by many within the church, including Emperor Charles V (ruled 1519–1556).

It was not until the election of Paul III in 1534 that strong leadership directed toward reform was restored to the papacy. Catholic reform came to pervade Rome during Paul's pontificate. The first papal-sponsored reform plans and projects were formulated and debated. Commissions dealing with specific abuses in the church were appointed. Outstanding men known for their support of reform were elevated to the college of cardinals and summoned to Rome to initiate and carry out reform. Recognizing the need for a General Council, Paul III created a nine-man commission in 1536 under the presidency of Gasparo Contarini to draw up a reform program that would serve as a foundation for conciliar discussions. The formation of this commission was a significant step toward Catholic reform as it sought to elevate the spiritual and moral life of the church and its clergy. In 1537, the commission issued its report, the *Consilium de emendanda ecclesia* (Advice on reform of the church), one of the great documents of Catholic reform. The document outlined in vivid frankness the problems and abuses in the church and clearly set forth recommendations to alter the existing conditions. The *Consilium* began by boldly affirming an exaggerated use of papal authority as the underlying problem in the church. Having stated this, the reformers highlighted specific abuses which they felt needed immediate attention, among them the state of religious orders and episcopal residency.

These first years of Paul III's pontificate witnessed the most earnest effort that was made to carry out a reform under papal initiative. With men such as Contarini in Rome efforts were made to reform the curia, to renew theology and the life of the church, and to reconcile with the Protestants. These efforts failed, however, and in 1542 Paul III established the Roman Inquisition to check the spread of Protestantism, almost exclusively in Italy. It also became clear to Paul III that the only means of reforming the church and answering the Protestant challenge was that of a Council.

THE COUNCIL OF TRENT

In 1544 Paul III issued a bull which convoked a General Council to meet in Trent. The Council of Trent was in session, with two lengthy adjournments, between 1545 and 1563. The council had three main objectives—to effect needed reform within the church, to clarify and define disputed doctrine and condemn heresy, and to restore the peace and unity of the church. The council was unable to accomplish this final goal since the split between Protestantism and Catholicism was now too deeply rooted. Thus, the council was confined to the Catholic world and functioned not as an instrument of reconciliation or reunion, but as a body legislating and defining for those who continued to profess the Catholic faith. It undertook this task from the outset, treating questions of doctrine and reform simultaneously.

In the area of doctrine, the council reaffirmed the authority of apostolic tradition as well as that of the Bible. It also declared the authenticity of the Vulgate but did not forbid critical editions in the original languages or vernacular translations. The most important of the doctrinal decrees was that on justification. It declared that humans are justified and saved only through God's grace freely bestowed on those who are baptized and have faith, but it insisted that humans participated in the process through a disposition for grace and a voluntary reception of it. The decree stressed the need for good works and observance of God's commandments. The council also issued dogmatic decrees on the seven sacraments, the Mass, purgatory, and the invocation of the saints. The decree on the Mass, affirming its sacrificial character, is second in importance only to the decree on justification among the council's declarations.

In the area of reform, the council focused on four basic problems that touched upon the pastoral mission of the church—the training of priests, the duty of preaching the gospel, the jurisdiction of bishops, and the obligation of residency for bishops and pastors. These decrees were the chief contribution of the Council of Trent to Catholic reform. Focusing especially on the role and responsibility of the bishop, the council affirmed the obligation of bishops to reside in their dioceses and gave bishops greater authority and powers over the clergy and religious orders in their diocese. The administrative

responsibility of the bishop was substantially restored at the same time that his primary role as pastor and teacher of his flock was strongly emphasized. Bishops were also obliged to establish seminaries for the training of future priests.

The Council of Trent clarified and defined many disputed doctrines, legislated reforms, and strengthened the church. The implementation of the decrees was left to the papacy. Pius IV (1559–1565) in 1564 approved and published the Tridentine decrees and created a committee to oversee their implementation and interpretation. At the same time that he proclaimed the Tridentine Profession of Faith, he issued a revised Index of Forbidden Books, which modified the more severe and rigid index issued by Paul IV (1555–1559) in 1559. Pius V (1566–1572) completed the work of the council

by issuing a standard catechism in 1566, a uniform Breviary in 1568, and a uniform Roman missal in 1570. The strong leadership of Pius V, Gregory XIII (1572–1585), and Sixtus V (1585–1590), which spanned the years 1566 to 1590, firmly established the papacy as the agent of Catholic reform.

Implementing the Tridentine decrees on the local level was not always easy and met with frustration. While theologians and church leaders anticipated that the implementation of the council would be met with great enthusiasm, the reality was far different. This situation arose as a result of an erroneous assumption that Catholic Reformation Catholicism would supersede the distinct flavor and traditions of local Catholicism that had developed over centuries. While the church did achieve some success in implementing reform along Tridentine



Council of Trent. Painting by Hermanos Zuccarelli, 1560–66. © ARCHIVO ICONOGRAFICO, S.A./CORBIS

lines, Catholicism would retain an element of local flavor both in Europe and the New World.

CONCLUSION

Certain basic characteristics stand out in the Catholic Reform movement from the time of Cisneros to the end of the Council of Trent: awareness of the need for reform and the serious efforts made to achieve it; preoccupation with individual and personal reform; and concern for the restoration and renewal of the Church's pastoral mission. Thus, Catholic reform was marked by a personal and pastoral orientation.

See also **Adrian VI (pope); Clement VII (pope); Gregory XIII (pope); Ignatius of Loyola; Jesuits; Leo X (pope); Paul III (pope); Pius IV (pope); Pius V (pope); Trent, Council of.**

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