

On This Rock: The Catholic Reformation

I will talk about Ignatius of Loyola in this lesson. Loyola was one of the great Catholic reformers of the sixteenth century, and he was the founder of the Society of Jesus. Protestants do not agree with Loyola on everything, perhaps not even on most things. Yet I am going to use a prayer from Ignatius of Loyola, because it is a prayer in which he prays to God that God will use him and that he will be devoted to God's service. We can certainly share that prayer with this great Catholic Counter-Reformation leader, in order that we too would be devoted to the service of God. Let us pray.

“Teach us, Lord, to serve You as You deserve, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to labor and not to ask for any reward save that of knowing that we do Your will.” Amen.

There is an old story that when Charles V called the Council at Augsburg in 1530, a group of actors appeared and asked the emperor's permission to put on a kind of play, a kind of pantomime. The emperor gave them permission to do it. So there entered into the hall, before Charles and the others, a masked figure in a doctor's gown. On the back of the figure was the name Johann Reuchlin. The figure threw down upon the floor a bundle of sticks. Some of the sticks were straight and some were crooked. Then the figure left. Next entered another figure, in like attire, whose name was Erasmus of Rotterdam. For a long time, he tried to make the crooked sticks square with the straight sticks. Finding that his labor was in vain, he retired in great disturbance of mind. The third masked figure was that of a monk, labeled Martin Luther. He brought in fire and fuel and set alight to the crooked sticks. When the flame caught them up, he too left. Then came in one clad like an emperor, who with his strong sword tried to keep the fire and the sticks apart. When the flame gathered strength all the more, he went away in great anger. Last of all entered a pope, who bore the name Leo X. He was wringing his hands, and he looked around him for some help. He saw two jars, one full of oil and the other of water. Rushing at them like a madman, he seized the oil and poured it upon the fire. When the fire spread all around, it compelled him to flee. No one knew who these actors were because, without waiting for pay, they disappeared. Yet the moral of their play was clear, and it was one even Charles V would have been able to understand.

In this lesson I am going to talk about the Catholic Reformation. That little story reviews some of the facts of the history that I have talked about so far. As we consider the whole sixteenth century, we can now focus on how the Catholic Church responded to all that I have been talking about. Sometimes it is called the Counter-Reformation. There is some legitimacy to using that expression, because the Catholics produced a Counter-Reformation to counter what the Protestants were doing. Usually, however, it is now called the Catholic Reformation, because Catholic scholars have said—with some degree of accuracy—that the Catholic Church was already trying to reform the church, even before the Protestant Reformation. The Protestants, in reforming as they did, caused the Catholic Reformation to move with greater speed. We can call it the Counter-Reformation or the Catholic Reformation, and I prefer the label Catholic Reformation.

At first, the Catholic Church reacted rather ineffectively to what the Protestants were doing. It took a while for the Catholic Church to get its act together and to begin to recover territory that had been lost to the Protestants. It took longer to not only win back that territory, but also to advance the Catholic Church in Europe and beyond Europe. There was a gradual development of this effective Catholic Reformation.

I will try to describe it for you with the illustration of an American football game, with the 25-year periods representing the quarters of a football game. At the end of the first quarter, the score was 7–0 in

favor of the Protestants. By the end of the first half, it was 35–7, and a route was taking place. At the end of the third quarter, however, it was 42–35 in favor of the Protestants. By the end of the game, it was 42–45 in favor of the Catholics. I just made that up, and I do not have any absolute assurance about that score, but it is my way of trying to describe how the Catholic Counter-Reformation very effectively recovered territory that had been lost in the middle and toward the end of the century.

I will describe this history in more detail, including some of the influences and figures related to the story. I must start with an important new Catholic order, the Society of Jesus. The story of the Society of Jesus begins in a cave in Spain in 1521. The year 1521 was also when Martin Luther was in the Wartburg, translating the New Testament into German. While Luther was hidden away in the Wartburg in Germany, a man named Ignatius of Loyola was hiding in a cave. He was not really hiding, but he had retreated to that cave in order to try to deal with the religious turmoil that was going on in his life. He had been a soldier, a Spanish soldier. He had been injured in a battle, so he decided to abandon the career of a soldier and become a pilgrim. He set out as a pilgrim and a penitent to the Shrine of Our Lady of Montserrat, where he hung up his sword, giving it over to Mary and dedicating his life to becoming a soldier of the church. He withdrew to the cave at Manresa, and there he prayed and sought God's guidance.

While he was there, he conceived of a book, which was published later, that became one of the most influential books of the sixteenth century, called *The Spiritual Exercises*. *The Spiritual Exercises* contains a series of guided meditations to use by a Christian to discipline himself and to develop in the Christian life. The book helped to create the order that Ignatius founded. A seventeenth-century illustrated edition of *The Spiritual Exercises* shows how it worked. One picture shows a man who is suffering from the seven deadly sins. *The Spiritual Exercises* identifies the seven deadly sins and how one could be rescued from a life given over to the seven deadly sins. There were different exercises and different approaches to Christian discipline and to the Christian life in *The Spiritual Exercises*.

After a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, time of study in Spain, and some uncertainty about what to do next, Ignatius of Loyola studied at the Sorbonne in Paris for a short time, at the College de Montague. He probably barely missed meeting John Calvin there, who had earned his Master of Arts there early in 1528. Then Loyola organized the Society of Jesus in 1534 along with six other men who shared his vision. The pope established the order in 1540. There was then a new Roman Catholic order. It would become the most powerful and most significant in the sixteenth-century Counter-Reformation.

Loyola drew up some "Rules for Thinking with the Church" as guidance for the Jesuits. His emphasis was that a Jesuit must have absolute obedience to the church. A Jesuit must also oppose the revival of true Augustinianism in the church. With those two rules, the Jesuit order was very much at the command of the pope. It was also very much opposed to any kind of Reformation teaching that would recover the teaching of Saint Augustine.

The Jesuits produced a disciplined and elite corps of men for the Counter-Reformation. It took 12 years of study and self-examination and discipline to become a Jesuit. The people who finished that program and entered the Society of Jesus were educated and disciplined people who were committed to their cause. If I return to the analogy of the football game, I might say there were some new players coming into the game. They were well prepared to play the game, and that is one reason why the game took on quite a different complexion in the third quarter.

The Jesuits specialized in education, which eventually led to the founding of great Jesuit universities. They still exist today. Saint Louis University is one of the Jesuit universities in the United States.

Around the world the Jesuits have created universities. From the very beginning, this order was concerned with education. They were also concerned with theology. One of the greatest of the Catholic theologians was Robert Bellarmine. The Jesuits were also concerned with counseling and spiritual guidance, as you might guess from *The Spiritual Exercises*. The Jesuits became experts in spiritual counseling. They even became infamous for it. They developed a system of casuistry, in which they could excuse almost anything for many people, if they did it in the right way. The Jesuits earned a reputation for saying one thing but meaning another. For them, however, it was part of casuistry and of spiritual counseling. There is an old Catholic joke that says there are three things that no one knows: how much a Dominican knows, how many orders there are for women in the Catholic Church, and what a Jesuit is really thinking. I did not make that up. Catholics tell it.

Another aspect of the Jesuit movement, and one that we admire because Protestants had not yet been able to move in this direction, was the emphasis on missions. The Jesuits did not remain in Europe. Under the leadership of the great Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier, they began to spread out around the world. That was long before Protestants were able to do anything similar. Xavier went first to India, and then all the way to Japan, preaching the Catholic faith. He died in 1552 on an island close to the coast of China. He was not able to enter China, but he longed to preach in China as well. He looked out upon that land and said it was “the rock that would not open.” He died on that island, looking at the great land of China, which proved impossible for him to enter. When Xavier died in 1552, there were over 1000 Jesuits in Europe, South America, Asia, and Africa. Thus the most significant figures of the century on the Catholic side were Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier, and the whole movement of the Society of Jesus.

The sixteenth century was also a time of flowering for Catholic spirituality, especially in Spain. Spain was the great Catholic power. France was powerful too, but Spain was more powerful than France or even Italy. Not only did Spain produce Loyola and Xavier, but it also produced two men by the name of John who were famous for their spirituality. One was Saint John of the Cross and the other was Saint John of God. Saint John of God became the patron saint of hospitals and of the sick. There is a hospital here in Saint Louis, which is across the street from Covenant Seminary, and which is named for this Saint John, the Spanish saint of the sixteenth century. There is a picture of him inside the door of the hospital, and when I go by it I thank God for Saint John of God and for doctors and nurses and hospitals.

Teresa of Avila was especially important for her spirituality. She was another Spanish figure of the sixteenth century. Teresa entered a Carmelite convent when she was 20 years old. She did not find it easy to be part of the convent. She says in her autobiography that she struggled for 20 years. She said, “On the one hand God was calling me, on the other hand I was following the world.” Even though she was in the convent, her interest and her direction was outside, in the world. She said, “All the things of God gave me pleasure, yet I was tied and bound to those of the world. It seemed as if I wanted to reconcile these two contradictory things. I spent nearly 20 years on that stormy sea, often falling in this way, and each time rising again, but to little purpose, as I would fall once more.”

For 20 years she struggled, but finally she came into a kind of victory, and her life then was marked with a single-minded purpose. She said some very interesting things. One statement of hers that I read recently was “Thank God for all the things I do not own.” That showed a drastic stripping down to essentials, which might also be a drastic enrichment of one’s life by enabling one to focus on the more important things.

The most important book of this period related to the inner life, or spirituality, was written by Teresa of Avila. It is called *The Interior Castle*. It is the story of the quest for a deepening life of fellowship with

God as God enters the many rooms of the human soul. It is something like a Spanish Catholic *Pilgrim's Progress*. It is organized in terms of a castle. It is beautifully written, and it is moving in places. It is clear, however, that Teresa was not a Protestant Reformer. Her theology is a combination of grace and works. There is no real assurance of salvation in the book.

Teresa is so interesting because she combines both the life of contemplation and the life of activity or action. Catholics often debated this issue. Should one give oneself over to contemplation or to activity? Should one be a Martha or a Mary? In Teresa of Avila we see a woman who was both. She was a very practically minded person. Even though she wrote books of devotion and spirituality, she could say, "From silly devotions and from sour-faced saints, good Lord, deliver us." She also reformed 16 Carmelite communities in Spain. She said she was able to do so much in her life by simply doing the next thing. That is probably good advice for any of us. The most famous picture of Teresa is "The Ecstasy of Teresa," which is really a statue in Rome by Bernini in the seventeenth century. A more accurate portrait is a contemporary drawing that shows her as a woman who knew what she was about.

I have talked about the Jesuits and about the spirituality of the century, represented particularly by Teresa of Avila. Another important consideration is what the papacy was doing at this time. Papal attempts at reform during the first half of the century were largely ineffective and half-hearted. There is a Lutheran cartoon that makes fun of the papal reform. It shows the pope and the cardinals trying to clean up things with some feather dusters as they dust around to remove cobwebs here and there. The cartoon is implying that the real reform was not being done. Using the analogy of the football game again, the problem was the quarterback—the pope—and the game plan, which was not an effective one.

Yet the popes realized that something had to be done or there would soon be no Catholic church at all. Pope Paul III was able to move the reform ahead, but it took him a while to do it. The popes would have liked to call a council to unite the church and oppose the Protestants, but that was a complicated procedure. While we might think it could have easily been done, there were political issues and all kinds of power plays within the Vatican as well as within the Catholic Church as a whole. Along with the political issues outside the church, it all made the calling of a council a difficult thing. For years Pope Paul III tried to organize a council, but the political problems and personal jealousies caused repeated postponements. Luther rather enjoyed watching all of this from Wittenberg. He compared the pope's repeated failures to convene a council to the story of a medieval scoundrel. He was condemned to die, and his final request was that he would be allowed to choose the limb from which he would be hanged. So he spent years leading his judges from tree to tree, never finding a limb that suited him.

Finally the pope was able to call the council. The council convened late in 1545. It was to be a church council for all Christians, including the Protestants, but Protestants did not attend because they realized it would not be a fair council. It would not have an open policy of debate. Luther fired one parting shot just before he died on February 18, 1546 and a few weeks after the council began, which was a book called *Against the Papacy in Rome Founded by the Devil*.

The Council of Trent worked on and off—mainly off—for the next 18 years. It did not meet consistently during that time, but it met in the town of Trent in northern Italy. It was not far from Rome, but it was in the bounds of the empire, so it was a neutral site. Finally in 1564, its work was completed. The canons and decrees of the Council of Trent summarize the Catholic doctrine. It was the first and most important council in the history of the church to fully discuss all aspects of the life of the church. The findings of the Council of Trent are summarized in the form of a short creed, called the "Profession of the Tridentine Faith." The council met at Santa Maria Maggiore Church in Trent to debate these momentous

issues. Engraved in the wall of that church, once the council was finished, were the words, “Here the Holy Spirit spoke for the last time.” The church believed that everything had been settled.

Let me give a few highlights of what the Council of Trent actually said. First, it centered authority in the papacy. During the late medieval period there had been numerous conciliar movements, which had claimed that the real power in the Catholic Church was with the bishops, or the councils. After Trent, however, the issue was settled, and it has been so until the present. The pope has the last word. The control of the church is centered in the papacy. Dr. Justo Gonzalez said, “The conciliar movement of the late Middle Ages had come to an end. The modern Catholic Church was born.”

Trent did succeed in correcting the abuses of the church. There are many issues that I have been talking about that were wrong with the Catholic Church, which the Protestants had pointed out repeatedly, such as the immorality and ignorance of the priests, the pluralism of holding more than one church office, and the list goes on. The Council of Trent cleaned up the life and ministry of the Catholic Church. Never again would the Catholic Church fall to the low levels that it fell to before the Protestant Reformation.

Trent also clarified Catholic doctrine. Much of it was clarified in opposition to Protestantism. There was certainly continuity with medieval Catholicism, but there was also a greater determination about what it meant to believe Catholic doctrine. Many issues that were debatable or open before were then closed. One Protestant Anglican scholar has spoken about the “new Trent religion.” A Catholic would never say that, because Trent represents to the Catholic mind what the Catholic Church had always believed. Yet I believe this scholar was right to say that there was something different about the Catholic Church after Trent. There was a “new Trent religion.”

The “new Trent religion” had some continuity with medieval Catholicism, but it also contained a hardening of the lines in opposition to contemporary Protestantism. I will comment on two aspects of the work of Trent. First I will mention the determination of the council that Scripture and tradition would be equal. They are on the same level, with dual authority, and equal reverence was to be given to Scripture and tradition. That was very much in opposition, of course, to the *sola Scriptura* teaching of the Protestant Reformation. We can compare the views of tradition by different groups in the sixteenth century. The Radical Reformers gave tradition a zero value. They wanted to get rid of it all and go back to the Bible. The Magisterial Reformers, such as Luther and Calvin, gave tradition a value of one. For them, tradition was not to be totally ignored and thrown out. It was to be subjected to the scrutiny of Scripture, but much of what had taken place in the history of the church could remain and could be learned from and built upon. The Roman Catholic position gave tradition a value of two. Trent said, “All saving truths and rules of conduct are contained in the written books and in the unwritten traditions, received from the mouth of Christ Himself or from the Apostles themselves.” It could be that the modern Catholic Church, after Vatican II, gives tradition a value of something between one and two. I will not talk in detail about that until the end of the semester.

Much time and effort was spent on the doctrine of justification. The Council of Trent developed a careful doctrine of justification by faith and love. Sometimes it can sound Protestant, but there is always a sentence after the Protestant-sounding part in the canons of Trent that adds something. Justification is by faith—Luther would say “alone,” but Trent would say “not alone.” Justification is by faith and love.

John Calvin wrote an answer to the acts of the Council of Trent. He called it the *Acts of the Council of Trent with the Antidote*. He wanted to be sure that Protestants not only understood what Trent was saying but also how to answer Trent. Calvin said, “The whole may be thus summed up—their error consists in sharing the work between God and ourselves, so as to transfer to ourselves the obedience of a

pious will in assenting to divine grace, whereas this is the proper work of God Himself.” Calvin was saying that Trent wanted to bring together what God does and what we do and perpetuate a kind of percentage theology. Such theology goes back a long time, to the semi-Pelagians. Calvin says that cannot be done. Salvation is the work of God alone, not the work of God plus our contribution to God’s work. Faith and repentance, according to Calvin and the Protestants, are part of salvation, not prior to salvation.

The Calvinist Reformed response to Trent came from John Calvin. The Lutheran response to Trent, which was even more massive than Calvin’s response, was a four-volume work by Martin Chemnitz. The Catholics recognized that in Calvin and Chemnitz they had worthy opponents. The Catholics often said that if the second Martin had not come, then the first Martin would not have stood. The second Martin was Martin Chemnitz, who defended the teaching of the first Martin, Martin Luther.

Questions about the role of tradition are common, and one question that has been asked is about the “Thirty-Nine Articles.” The “Thirty-Nine Articles” have a Reformed emphasis, and they are indeed Reformed. It is a Reformed confession. Yet Anglican teaching links Scripture and reason and tradition as being three authorities, or three standards for the church’s faith and polity. That teaching comes from Bishop Thomas Hooker. I will talk about this more in another lesson when I talk about Anglicanism versus Puritanism, for this teaching comes out of that debate, but I will talk about it briefly now. Hooker did say that even though there are those three standards—Scripture, reason, and tradition—reason and tradition are under Scripture. He did not make them equal authorities. Perhaps other people sometimes see those as equal authorities, but in Thomas Hooker’s teaching they are not equal.

The “Thirty-Nine Articles” are Reformed, but they are open to misinterpretation. I suppose that any confession is open to misinterpretation, but there are some ambiguous phrases and statements. When reading the “Thirty-Nine Articles” from a Calvinistic point-of-view, those ambiguous statements can be read as Calvinistic, but they can be read in other ways too. John Henry Newman, in the nineteenth century in the Tractarian Movement, tried to read the “Thirty-Nine Articles” in line with medieval Catholicism in his famous “Tract 90.” That created an uproar in England, and Newman knew that he was finished in the Church of England, so he became a Roman Catholic. He was a Roman Catholic in his soul before that time. The “Thirty-Nine Articles,” when interpreted in a proper historical way, are quite true to the Reformed faith. When the Westminster Assembly met to draw up the Westminster Confession, they started by intending to simply revise the “Thirty-Nine Articles.” They got through Article 15 before they decided to start over and create a new confession. If you study what the Westminster did with the “Thirty-Nine Articles,” you will find they made very few changes to the first 15 articles.

Another question that is asked is how to understand the mystical experiences of Teresa. The statue of Teresa by Bernini that I mentioned earlier depicts her in ecstasy, in one of those experiences in which she was caught up in some other-worldly experience. That is not an unusual aspect of Catholic spirituality. Most of the saints claimed something like it, or even the stigmata, with the wounds of Christ being received in the body of the Catholic mystic. Protestants have a difficult time with such things. We tend to doubt them. Mysticism in the Catholic world and in the Protestant world, too, is something that is un-provable. The only evidence we have is someone saying, “This is what happened to me.” There is a Protestant mysticism, but Protestants tend to avoid the excesses of Catholic mysticism because Protestants are more tied to the Word of God. Catholic mysticism can often depart from the Word to a kind of unknown land. When I read such accounts, I am skeptical. I think I am too committed to Warfield to allow much opening for these things. At the same time, I do not want to say that just because

a person claims a mystical experience that I question, then everything that person does is of no value. There is a great deal from some of the mystics that we can learn from.

At a funeral recently there was a quotation from Saint Teresa on the order of worship. That struck me as interesting, because this woman had been a strong believer, and yet we were reading something that Saint Teresa had said. It was something that moved her very much; she had loved Saint Teresa's writings, and they had brought her great comfort as she died of cancer. The quotation was this: "Let nothing disturb thee, nothing fright thee. All things are passing. God never changes. Patient endurance attains to all things. Who God possesses in nothing is wanted. Alone God suffices." We can all say "amen" to that.

You might wonder about the Catholic Church today and its relation to Trent. All of that teaching is still current. It has not been revised or changed. There is a new Catholic catechism, but it is supposed to flow out of the Council of Trent. What is happening today is that much is being rethought, and perhaps Trent is being read in a more Protestant direction. It is not that the Catholic Church has changed its mind on any of these things, but some people in the church are trying to be more Protestant. The Evangelicals and Catholic Together group produced a paper called *The Gift of Salvation*. That paper is amazing to me because it is very Protestant, very Reformed, and it does not sound Tridentine to me. Yet the Catholic scholars are certainly as committed to Trent as the Reformed scholars are committed to the Westminster Confession.

A few years ago, when Thomas Howard converted to the Catholic Church, he said that in the canons of Trent he found everything that he believed as an evangelical. I cannot see it. I read Trent in terms of its sixteenth-century setting, where it was consciously being set against Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Protestantism in general. If you read it in terms of its sixteenth-century setting, you will have to admit that two different types of Christianity are being set forth. There is the Protestant faith and the Catholic faith. They are not the same thing, and they are not even close together on some very important issues. If you read these documents such as the "Thirty-Nine Articles" or the Council of Trent in a certain way, they can be forced or manipulated to mean something that they did not historically mean but which contemporary people would like for them to mean.

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God shall stand forever" (Isaiah 40:8).