

Introduction

In a letter written in 1678, the Belgian Jesuit Ferdinand Verbiest, provincial of the China mission and future director of the Astronomy Bureau under the Qing emperor Kangxi, appealed to his fellow Jesuits in Europe: so many souls to be won, yet so few workers in the harvest. Painting a glorious picture of conversion, Verbiest described the arduous sea voyage from Europe to China, during which many missionaries met martyrdom in shipwreck. Those who reached China, Verbiest sighed, would look back to the ocean after a long labor of evangelization, longing for the glorious shipwreck that was not their fate.

This rhetoric of heroism and self-dramatization, reminiscent of the language of the early Reformation, hints at the underlying unity between the histories of the Reformation and Catholicism in early modern Europe. Both sides claimed martyrs, compiled liturgies, and rewrote Church histories: the mirroring of images in a divided Christianity suggests developments far more profound, far more complex than a simple contradistinction between the terms “Reformation” and “Counter-Reformation” would imply. This book represents an attempt to understand the Catholic side of that experience: it cannot pretend to offer a comprehensive history of early modern Catholicism (that task is beyond the capacity of any single individual); it tries instead to offer an interpretation of the historical events experienced in the Catholic lands of Europe and the wider world; and it navigates a path in the seemingly endless ocean of scholarship (like Verbiest, I sometimes wished I had been shipwrecked en route).

In choosing the title for this book, I have consciously steered clear of the reefs of controversial historical concepts. The term “Counter-Reformation,” as Albert Elkan pointed out in his 1914 essay,¹ originally appeared during the 1770s in the handbooks for the history of the Holy Roman Empire published by the Göttingen jurist Johann Stephan Pütter.

¹ “Entstehung und Entwicklung des Begriffs ‘Gegenreformation,’” *Historische Zeitschrift* 112 (1914), 473–93.

Cambridge University Press

0521602416 - The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540-1770 - Second Edition

R. Po-chia Hsia

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2 The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540–1770

Used as a concept in legal history, “Counter-Reformation” denotes the reversion of confessional allegiance in the Holy Roman Empire between 1555 and 1648, when Catholic emperors and princes captured and recatholicized territories hitherto under the banner of Protestant reform. Describing a period embedded between the 1555 Religious Peace of Augsburg that established the principle of territorial churches (epitomized by the formula *cuius regio eius religio*) and the 1648 Peace of Westphalia that stabilized confessional boundaries, the term “Counter-Reformation” was not intended to apply beyond the confines of the Holy Roman Empire. It was ironic that the concept “Counter-Reformation” appeared in the 1770s during the suppression of the Society of Jesus to describe a legal system in the Holy Roman Empire that would itself disappear in 1803. Gaining acceptance in the 1830s, the terms “Counter-Reformation” and “Counter-Reformations” achieved distinction with the history of the popes by the great Protestant historian Leopold von Ranke. Impressed by the resurgence of Catholicism during the second half of the sixteenth century, especially in Italy, Ranke imparted a dynamic and creative dimension to Catholicism. Deeply influenced by the Romantic movement, Ranke’s interpretation of the early modern papacy no doubt echoed the remarkable recovery of the Church after its debacle during the French Revolution and Napoleonic domination.

The spirit of the Restoration, marked by a reconstituted Society of Jesus and resurrected papacy, yielded to a new rancor in the 1870s and 1880s, just when the term gained currency in German university teaching and scholarship, provoked by the *Kulturkampf* in the newly united German Empire. Objecting to the passive and reactionary connotations of the term, Catholic scholars have contested the term “Counter-Reformation,” substituting instead “Catholic reform,” “Catholic Reformation,” or “Catholic Restoration.” That debate has continued, on and off, beyond 1945. It is not necessary to follow every twist and turn in the subsequent historiography, which is succinctly spelled out in the brilliant essay by Henry Outram Evennett (written in 1951 and published in 1968)² and in the much fuller dissection by Erwin Iserloh and Hubert Jedin.³

An echo of that debate is still heard in the English-language historiography. Catholic historians, quite naturally, emphasized the positive and creative aspects of sixteenth-century Catholicism. The 1963 study by Pierre Janelle, stressing both the continuity between medieval and sixteenth-century mysticism and the “modernity” of the Jesuits, calls the phenomenon “Catholic Reformation.”⁴ Entrenched in the historical

² *The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation* (Cambridge, 1968).

³ *Reformation, katholische Reform, und Gegenreformation* (Freiburg, 1967).

⁴ *The Catholic Reformation* (Milwaukee, 1963).

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction

3

imagination, however, the term “Counter-Reformation” resists exorcism. Even a profoundly sympathetic study of Catholicism by Henry Outram Evennett employs the term, albeit with reservation: “I feel convinced that in the case with which we are dealing, the concept of the Counter-Reformation as essentially ‘reactionary’ and backward-looking has tended to obscure, and certainly to obstruct, any attempt to synthesize the many ways in which it was, in effect, the evolutionary adaptation of the Catholic religion and of the Catholic Church to new forces both in the spiritual and in the material order.” Evennett was working against the image of Spanish (and Habsburg) arms propping up the authority of the Catholic Church and suppressing liberty of conscience, the “Black Legend” elaborated in Protestant historiography since the sixteenth century. Instead of diplomacy and armed conflict, Evennett focused on spirituality: of Filippo Neri, Ignatius of Loyola, and generally of the spirit animating the work of charity and piety in the Italian cities of the early sixteenth century. Here, then, was a gentle, moderate Catholic spirit in contrast to the unbending and harsh image of the Spanish Inquisition.

By the 1970s, there was considerable interest in rewriting the history of early modern Catholicism; one such attempt equated good history with the establishment of confessional balance in historiography. In his introduction to Marvin R. O’Connell’s *The Counter-Reformation 1559–1610* (1974), William L. Langer, the editor of the series, declares precisely this intention: “Most histories of the Counter-Reformation have been written by Protestants and even the most scholarly can hardly be called free of prejudice. For this reason it was decided . . . to entrust the stormy period from 1559 to 1610 to a competent Catholic scholar, who would be able to write understandingly of the determined efforts of the Catholic Church to reform itself.” Langer did not specify the qualities of “a competent Catholic scholar”; and the book, written with verve and color, follows a narrow chronological framework established by the series itself. Chronology notwithstanding, the diversity and multiplicity of historical currents linked to Catholic resurgence clearly cannot be captured within a narrow periodization. Both ends of the timeframe 1559 to 1610 were being stretched: while John C. Olin pushed back the origins of reform within the Catholic Church to the Spain of Isabella and Ferdinand and the Florence of Savonarola,⁵ German and French historians were extending their investigation forward to the eighteenth century. Perhaps the single

⁵ *The Catholic Reformation: Savonarola to Ignatius Loyola* (New York, 1969); see also his *Catholic Reform: From Cardinal Ximenes to the Council of Trent 1495–1563* (New York, 1990).

Cambridge University Press

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R. Po-chia Hsia

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4 The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540–1770

most important impetus, in this spate of new scholarship on the history of Catholicism, was the publication in 1975 of the final volume in Hubert Jedin's monumental *Geschichte des Konzils von Trient*, the first volume of which had appeared in 1950.

In Germany, where Jedin's *œuvre* made the most impact, the new approach in Catholic historical scholarship was not so much to contest the term "Gegenreformation" as to elevate the concept to a par with "Reformation." A landmark essay by Wolfgang Reinhard in 1977 rejects the antithesis of "progressive Reformation" and "reactionary Counter-Reformation."⁶ Criticizing both the terms "Counter-Reformation" and "Catholic Reform" as inadequate concepts in understanding the totality of historical development, and not just ecclesiastical history, Reinhard argues in favor of the term "Confessional Age" (*konfessionelles Zeitalter*) whereby Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Catholicism can be analyzed as parallel developments in a still larger historical unfolding of structures. The most original contribution in this provocative essay is Reinhard's description of the modernity of the Counter-Reformation: its disciplinary and Christianizing measures, its reforms of Church administration, its dissolution of archaic primary ties (i.e., kinship), its push toward individualization, its emphasis on internalization of values and activism (Jesuits), its push toward state poor relief, its modification of European ethnocentrism (in missions), and its ties to a new pedagogic system, new political themes, and new economic ethics. Although schematic in his formulations (and some of the theses are untenable), Reinhard has challenged the Protestant monopoly on "modernity," established on the authority of Max Weber. A similar focus on parallel structures and developments between the confessions is also manifest in *Das Zeitalter der Gegenreformation von 1555 bis 1648* (1979) by Ernst Walter Zeeden. Devoting most of his attention to describing and analyzing the history of Calvinism and the Jesuits, Zeeden amplifies the structural balance between Tridentine Catholicism and Calvinism by elaborating a theory of confessionalization, in which he stresses the interpenetration of political power and religious spirituality on both sides.

While the antithesis between Reformation and Counter-Reformation was slowly being resolved in the dialectic of German university debates, English and French historians have considerably expanded the terms of the discussion. In his 1971 book, *Le catholicisme entre Luther et Voltaire*, Jean Delumeau dismisses the significance of the Counter-Reformation as such: "The Counter-Reformation existed . . . but it was not essential to

⁶ "'Gegenreformation als Modernisierung?' Prolegomena zu einer Theorie des konfessionellen Zeitalters," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 68 (1977), 226–52.

the transformation of the Catholic Church from the sixteenth century.”⁷ Instead, Delumeau establishes a sharp contrast between medieval and early modern Europe: medieval Christianity (“the legend of a Christian Middle Ages”) was, in this interpretation, magical and pagan; Tridentine Catholicism represented a massive attempt at Christianization, characterized by the training of a new clergy, the catechizing of the common folk, evangelizing in the non-European world, and the combating of popular superstitions.

This process, still imperfectly completed by the eighteenth century, gave way to the assault of the Enlightenment, with declining rates of sacramental conformity and flagging religious fervor, a phenomenon described by some scholars as “dechristianization.” Questioning the appropriateness of this term, Delumeau asks how one can speak of dechristianization when the masses were not even properly Christianized. Christianity, as it was preached by the Church between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, according to Delumeau, presented a vengeful, angry God, inspiring fear and anxiety, not the Christianity he himself had come to understand. In the twenty years since the publication of that book, Delumeau has expounded at great length on his original thesis. In *La peur en Occident* and *Le Pêché et la peur*, he describes, in massive detail, the pervasive anxiety and fear, transformed into feelings of guilt and sin by the relentless effort of the Church, the “culpabilization” of society, as it were.⁸ To assuage that fear, a vast paraphernalia – both sacramental and para-sacramental – was offered by the Church: benedictions, processions, saints, guardian angels, requiem masses, and Marian devotion.⁹ Resisting both Protestant eradication and Tridentine reform, this popular religion, suffused with deep anxiety, was alleviated only by the gradual improvement of material life during the eighteenth century. Under this vast vision of *histoire de sentiment*, Delumeau subordinates both Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation to the even longer duration of Christianization, and the finer points of historical details seem lost in the overarching fresco that elude the eye of the beholder.

Among Delumeau’s critics (and admirers), the English historian John Bossy has carefully analyzed the fundamental transformation from late

⁷ “La Contre-Réforme a existé . . . mais elle n’a pas été l’essentiel de la transformation de l’Eglise catholique à partir du XVI^e siècle.”

⁸ *La peur en Occident, XIV^e–XVIII^e siècles. Une cité assiégée* (Paris, 1978), and *Le Pêché et la peur. La culpabilisation en Occident (XIII^e–XVIII^e siècles)* (Paris, 1983).

⁹ Two books by Delumeau elaborate on this argument: *Rassurer et protéger. Le sentiment de sécurité dans l’Occident d’autrefois* (Paris, 1989), and *L’aveu et le pardon. Les difficultés de la confession, XIII^e–XVIII^e siècles* (Paris, 1990), analyze the inadequacy of confession as an instrument for reassurance.

6 The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540–1770

medieval to early modern Christianity. Taking issue with Delumeau's vision of a pagan Middle Ages, Bossy, in a series of essays on confession, mass, and parish administration, contrasts a pre-Tridentine Christianity based on the natural allegiances of late medieval society – kinship, friendship, and locality – to one organized theologically and administratively from above by the official Church.¹⁰

A rough consensus has thus emerged, at least in the English-language historiography. Michael Mullett puts it succinctly when he argues that all reforms, Protestant and Catholic, had their origins in late medieval Christianity, and that any understanding of early modern Catholicism must take into consideration the period after 1650.¹¹ Yet, as the title of Mullett's short essay reveals, a certain unease still obtains in the choice of terminology. Nicholas Davidson calls his survey *The Counter-Reformation*, although admitting that neither that term nor "Catholic Reformation" is entirely satisfactory;¹² Keith Randell simply gives up choosing between contending concepts in his short textbook;¹³ and the most recent introduction by Martin D. W. Jones retains the term "Counter-Reformation" even as the selection of documents include a large variety of topics previously excluded from similar texts.¹⁴

One of the prominent themes ignored in the traditional historiography of early modern Catholicism, and still neglected in the current crop of texts, is the history of non-European Catholicism. To be true, the history of missions constitutes a venerable subject in ecclesiastical history, but until recently the practitioners of the field have described the encounter between Christianity and non-European civilizations from the perspective of European missionaries, an understandable bias given the overwhelming preponderance of sources in European languages. Things have changed. There is now a greater recognition that any history of Christianization in Europe, or what constitutes the subject matter of popular religion, would be enriched by investigations into the encounter between European and non-European civilizations during the expansion of Catholic Europe. The Tridentine Church recognized as much.

¹⁰ Bossy's argument for the centrality of parish devotion after Trent is set out in "The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Europe," *Past and Present* 47 (1970), 51–70. For his contrasting models of a kin-based late medieval Christianity and one organized hierarchically from the top, see Bossy, "The Social History of Confession," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 25 (1975), 21–38; Bossy, "The Mass as a Social Institution 1200–1700," *Past and Present* 100 (1983), 29–61; and Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1985).

¹¹ *The Counter-Reformation and the Catholic Reformation in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1984).

¹² *The Counter-Reformation* (Oxford, 1987).

¹³ *The Catholic and Counter Reformations* (London, 1990).

¹⁴ *The Counter-Reformation: Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1995).

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction

7

Jesuit missionaries spoke of “the Indies” in the remote rural corners of Catholic Europe, whose populations were equally in need of evangelization and ecclesiastical discipline; Italian intellectuals of the Enlightenment discussed the necessity of the seminary for Chinese priests, the Collegio dei Cinesi, established in 1732 in Naples, whose foundation would benefit the Chinese peasants much more than the “more barbaric” Neapolitan peasants; and as early as 1585 a German translation of Jesuit reports from Japan praised the spread of the Catholic faith “to the other side of the world,” a wondrous act of God to punish the Germans for falling away from his true Church and to compensate for the lost souls of central Europe with new ones won from the land of heathens. The Counter-Reformation, even in its strict definition, acquires a world-historical dimension; hence the centuries of Catholic renewal formed the first period of global history.

These then are some of the ideas underlying my interpretation. By entitling this book “The world of Catholic renewal,” I mean to incorporate the concepts “Catholic Reform” and “Counter-Reformation” under the larger rubric of world history. Four themes inform my analysis of Catholic renewal: the reorganization of doctrine and Church from above; the interaction between politics and religion in Europe; the social and cultural manifestations of Catholic renewal; and the encounter between Catholic Europe and the non-Christian world.

Under the first theme I describe the measures undertaken by the Catholic Church to reassert sacerdotal authority in the face of Protestant and lay challenges. I begin this story with the Council of Trent, weaving into this narrative moments of earlier Catholic reform. Five subsequent chapters explore various parts of the reinvigorated Ecclesiastical Body: chapter 6 offers an analysis of the early modern papacy focusing on the changing character of the Papal States and the social history of the papacy; chapter 2 introduces the leading Tridentine religious orders that played a crucial role in the Catholic renewal; chapter 7 examines two processes central to Tridentine reform – reinforcing episcopal authority and disciplining the clergy; chapter 8 offers a social history of sanctity in early modern Catholicism by presenting a profile of the men and women canonized and beatified by the resurgent Roman Catholic Church; chapter 9 sharpens the focus on women’s experience in the Tridentine Church by looking at the lives of nuns and beatas. I have organized these chapters in a conventional manner not only to give sufficient credit to ecclesiastical history, but also to emphasize that Catholic renewal, at least in its early phase, represented an ecclesiastical effort to strengthen sacerdotal authority, a move contested, as we shall see, by other religious visions on the part of secular authorities and the laity.

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0521602416 - The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540-1770 - Second Edition

R. Po-chia Hsia

Excerpt

[More information](#)

8 The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540–1770

The second theme informs a cluster of three chapters (3–5). By dividing Catholic Europe into the “martyred Church,” “militant Church,” and “triumphant Church,” I hope to underscore the role played by geography, national sentiment, and international politics in shaping the experience of Catholic renewal. National differences marked the very inception of Tridentine reform: whereas the decrees of the Council were readily adopted in Spain, Belgium, Italy, and Poland, their implementation in France and Germany lingered into the eighteenth century. Evennett has described a sixteenth-century Catholicism centered in Spain and Italy giving precedence to French spirituality in the seventeenth century. Although he may have underestimated the Mediterranean contribution in the seventeenth century, Evennett is certainly right in remarking on national differences in spiritual styles and ecclesiastical politics. I have attempted in these chapters to sketch the complicated interplay between politics and religion without losing the thematic structure in a morass of narrative details.

We depart from Europe in chapters 12 and 13. The encounter between Catholic Europe and non-Christian civilizations is organized geographically and analytically. Conquest, settlement, forced evangelization: this was the pattern established in the Americas that duplicated to a considerable extent the experience of Iberian Catholicism at home – the collaboration and tension between secular and ecclesiastical authorities, the mystical and missionary fervor of the Iberian Church, and the repression of heresy and “superstitions.” Our understanding has been enriched in particular by recent scholarship on colonial Latin America; more subtle theories of cultural encounters and adaptations have replaced an earlier paradigm of evangelization and spiritual conquest. China, Japan, and the Philippines represent another model of Catholic expansion. In these lands far from the heartland of Catholic Europe the friars and the Jesuits advanced the cause of Catholicism without the threat of swords and arquebuses. Unlike the experience of Latin America, whose history of Christianization was based overwhelmingly on European sources, historians of China and Japan can tap on a fairly large body of sources in indigenous languages that document the other side of the encounter. Whether evangelization resulted in rejection, as in the case of Japan, or in accommodation (some scholars prefer the term “inculturation”), as in China, the insights gained in this analysis allow historians to examine the European experience in a new light. The paucity of European priests, the thinness of ecclesiastical institutions, the incompleteness of indoctrination, the incomprehension of local customs: these were all issues that confronted the missions; pondering this problematic allows historians to establish in turn a comparative framework to question the relationship

Cambridge University Press

0521602416 - The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540-1770 - Second Edition

R. Po-chia Hsia

Excerpt

[More information](#)

between Church and people, official and popular religions in Catholic Europe.

The final theme addresses “the Counter-Reformation and the people of Catholic Europe,” to quote from the title of Bossy’s landmark essay. Chapter 10 deals with the impact of Catholic renewal on art; it examines patronage, production, and the consumption of art, ranging from the sculpture and paintings of the Baroque papal court to the massively printed devotional images for the devout. Chapter 14 reflects on the influence of Tridentine reform on the religious sentiments and practices of the population: it addresses the question of success, defined in terms of sacramental conformity, parish devotion, popular cults, and the eradication of “superstitions,” criteria established by the ecclesiastical hierarchy; and finally, it offers a tentative interpretation of the experience of Catholicism in early modern Europe, in light of theories of “Christianization” and “social discipline.”

My interpretation is necessarily selective. No historian in a lifetime can hope to master the sources and languages required to write a comprehensive history of Catholicism in early modern world history that transcends the traditional boundary of Church history. Specialists will recognize my indebtedness to the large and growing scholarship in many fields of historical research. I have tried to give an introductory orientation to the scholarship in an extended bibliographical essay. If this synthesis generates debates and research, it will more than have served its purpose.

1 The Council of Trent

The Council of Trent opened on the thirteenth of December, 1545. A host of ecclesiastical dignitaries assembled in the Church of the Most Holy Trinity. They then marched in solemn procession to the Gothic cathedral in the center of town. First came the secular and regular clergy of the city – the priests in black cassocks and white surplices; the friars in black, grey, and white. Next came the exalted canons of the cathedral chapter, all members of the nobility. After them marched the prelates of the Council and the envoys of King Ferdinand I of the Romans, followed by the nobility and a great crowd of citizens. Three archbishops, twenty-one bishops, and the generals of five mendicant orders – the Conventual and Observant Franciscans, the Augustinians, the Carmelites, and the Servites – represented the official delegates. While waiting to file into the vaulted cathedral for solemn high mass, the opening act of the long-awaited Church Council, the three papal legates, in their cardinal purple, could look up at the snow-capped hills and remember the vineyards in spring when they had first arrived in this forlorn frontier city.

They had waited almost a year. The opening of the Council March to May, as delegates and bishops slowly drifted into Trent. By July, most of the delegates were Italians, although French and Spanish delegates arrived in late summer. But there were still no Germans, the nation that had started this schism in the first place. The delegates at the opening session represented a tiny section of the universal Church. Most were Italians, with the exception of two Spanish bishops, one English, one French, and one German bishop. Little did they know that, when the work of the Council was finally done – after eighteen years, two long interludes, and twenty-five sessions – they themselves would be long dead.

It was a distinguished trio that presided. Giovanni Maria del Monte (1487–1555), son of a well-known Roman jurist, studied law at Perugia and Siena and became chamberlain to Pope Julius II. In 1511 he succeeded his uncle as archbishop of Siponto, became bishop of Pavia in 1520, and served in the papal government as governor of Rome and vice-legate of Bologna under Clement VII and Paul III. Elevated to