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052164061X - Peace in the Post-Reformation: The Birkbeck Lectures 1995

John Bossy

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At the beginning of these four lectures I should like to thank the Master and Fellows of Trinity who have done me the honour of inviting me to give them; and to remember two previous lecturers. One of them is Outram Evennett, who gave his lectures on the Counter-Reformation in 1951, and the other is Denys Hay, whose series on the church in Italy in the fifteenth century came twenty years later.¹ In brilliance and coherence, in learning and humanity, not to say eloquence, they are a hard pair of acts to follow. Their shadows will loom. I shall be less optimistic than Evennett, and less pessimistic than Hay; which is partly because I shall be talking, most of the time, about something a little different from either. Meanwhile I express my gratitude to Evennett for the bird's eye view of the Counter-Reformation without which I doubt if I could have got the subject into historical focus at all. These lectures may be found to complement his or to contradict them; but they will always be somewhere around. To Denys Hay I owe a more particular thank-you for introducing me to that magic moment in the history of the West when Duke Giovanni Maria Visconti of Milan ordered, in vain, that the word *pax* be left

¹ H. O. Evennett, *The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation* (Cambridge, 1968); Denys Hay, *The Church in Italy in the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1977; given in 1971).

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out of the mass and the word *tranquillitas* put in instead.² ‘Et in terra tranquillitas.’

My original title was ‘Moral Tradition and Counter-Reformation’, and it will do for the first two lectures. I put no spin on the second term, and have only to say that I shall be using words like ‘reform’ sparingly, if at all. On the Catholic side at least, and from where I shall be standing, we can readily get on without them. ‘Moral tradition’ is a coinage of my own, with some reference to Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue*.³ It joins together three items: the notion or practical instinct that to be a Christian means to love your neighbour, and in particular your enemy; the fact that in these times and places it was very likely that people might be in a state of enmity towards others, which would call for arrangements of peacemaking if it was to be resolved; and the historic or perhaps archaic connection between these arrangements and the sites, rites and persons of the church. The connection might come in various forms; in so far as it was with ecclesiastical persons, it was very far from exclusive.⁴

That is my moral tradition. Since the term is not self-explanatory, I have substituted for it in my title, ‘peace’; but I shall use it throughout these lectures. I take what it represents to have been rather deeply embedded in the consciousness of the populations of the West at the time of the Reformation, and want to know what happened to it thereafter. First, what happened to it in some of the lands where the Roman church maintained its sway; but also what happened to it in lands that became Protestant, which has seemed to me, as I have proceeded, an increasingly

² Hay, *The Church in Italy*, p. 82 (1409). ³ 2nd edn (London, 1985).

⁴ I have pursued this theme in ‘Blood and Baptism’, *Studies in Church History*, x: *Sanctity and Secularity*, ed. D. Baker (Oxford, 1973), pp. 129–43; ‘Holiness and Society’, *Past and Present*, no. 75 (1977), at pp. 130–5; in my edition of the essays in *Disputes and Settlements: Law and Human Relations in the West* (Cambridge, 1983), and in other pieces cited below.

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substantial part of my story. Hence the rest of my title, which has the extra benefit of putting due weight on the state of affairs, on both sides of the confessional fence, as the seismic upheavals of the sixteenth century settled down into everyday continuity. I shall say now, so as not to have to repeat it, that I do not see any of the branches of the western church as they emerged after the Reformation as having a special claim to be the vehicle of my moral tradition. At the end of the lectures I shall enquire whether one of those branches had a bias against it.

A few other remarks before I begin. I shall not be asking why people got to hate each other; and I shall be dealing with parties who were roughly on a footing of equality. The focus of my interest, because I think it was probably the centre of gravity of the moral tradition at this time, will be the middle and upper reaches of more or less rural communities. I shall try not to get too involved with the particular case of human relations between Protestants and Catholics as such, or between different kinds of Protestant: it is sometimes important to the main theme, but more often, I think, presents a temptation leading out of the way. I shall take the four countries I discuss separately, because there is a different story in each, and because sometimes I shall need to put the politics back in. Finally I ask your indulgence for having chosen a topic which is both unmanageably large and perhaps rather novel: I feel that it is still in a very plastic state, and that its final shape and import remain uncertain.

It is proper to start with Italy, because Italy has been a favoured environment of the moral tradition. That tradition here had a special force, and was constitutive of a great deal of social and political life. In the back country of Liguria, now classically described by Osvaldo Raggio, law and government amount to the peace in the feud: pacification and arbitration between those in a state of *inimicizia* (enmity), with compensation to *parenti*,

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who may be natural or artificial, for offences. The instrument, one may say, of continuing existence is the *instrumentum pacis* drawn up by, and lodged with, the notary. Churches have altars where such *paci* are celebrated: in the plainest case, Our Lady of the Miracles, no less. The kiss of peace is exchanged; marriages may follow, projecting amicable relations or new hostilities into the future. Here the priests of the parish or *pieve* are not involved, except as parties, since every one of them represents his *parentela*: the notary, the local grandee, the visiting commissioner of the state, which is the Genoese Republic, are the arbitrators. Virtually nothing to do with the clergy, the peace process is nevertheless – possibly all the more – a work of Christianity. It is also essential to everything else. I quote Raggio: ‘The political unity of the group of kinsmen is built . . . above all on enmities, their settlements, and the *paci*.’⁵

You will say: the back-blocks of Liguria are the back-blocks of Liguria, not the Po valley, or Venice or Milan. But what we have found there is a model of what prevailed throughout the peninsula and its appendages, and not only in the mountains and the islands, though it stood out more starkly there, and had less competition. The moral tradition, of which Liguria offers a particularly functional example, thrives in mountain and plain, city and countryside, north and south. At the highest levels of Renaissance sophistication we may think of it as weakening; the state, which holds the ring in Liguria, will act more directly in Tuscany. Such things will matter in the long run: they had not yet disturbed the centrality of this tradition in the moral consciousness of Italians. Italy was the homeland of the fraternity, one of

⁵ Osvaldo Raggio, *Faide e parentele: lo stato genovese visto dalla Fontanabuona* (Turin, 1990), introduction and chaps. 1, 4, 7, quoted at p. 177; the only comparable study that I know is Otto Brunner, *Land und Herrschaft*, 4th edn (Vienna and Wiesbaden, 1959), pp. 1–110.

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whose marks was the settlement of disputes among members; of friars like San Bernardino, endlessly preaching the social miracle to vast crowds in fifteenth-century cities; of the real and fictional Piovano Arlotto, whose pursuit of charity and good humour in and out of the *Uccellatoio* (the Fowlhouse, an inn at Macioli outside Florence) made him a classic representative of the moral tradition and the hero of a best-seller of long standing which the Counter-Reformation failed to suppress. It was home, to finish, to the now equally but tragically famous miller Domenico Scandella *alias* Menocchio, who thought, if I understand him, that the Gospel could be reduced to the words ‘Forgive us our trespasses.’ He was not the only one.⁶

There was plenty of confusion in the peninsula during the fateful decades between the emergence of Luther across the Alps and the closure of the Council of Trent, and one of the things subject to confusion was the status of this moral tradition. I am not thinking here of Machiavelli’s radical scepticism about the utility of Christian ethics, but of confusion in the ranks of those from whom the counter-reformation church was to emerge. I illustrate it, briefly, from the career of Gianmatteo Giberti, split by the dreadful sack of Rome in 1527 between his European politics as Pope Clement VII’s secretary of state, dedicated as much as Machiavelli to the ‘liberty of Italy’, and his ecclesiastical government as bishop of Verona, from then until his death in 1543. The first part was a fiasco, the second inspired a generation of successors. He was an intensely vigorous and, his doctor said,

⁶ Ronald Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1982), pp. 1–105; Iris Origo, *The World of San Bernardino* (London, 1963), chap. 6; G. Folena (ed.), *Motti e facezie del Piovano Arlotto* (Milan and Naples, 1953), nos. 36, 64, 143, etc.; F. W. Kent and Amanda Lillie, ‘The Piovano Arlotto: New Documents’, in P. Denley and C. Elam (eds.), *Florence and Italy: Renaissance Studies in Honour of Nicolai Rubinstein* (London, 1988), pp. 347–67; my *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1985), p. 64; C. Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms* (London, 1980), pp. 11, 87–8, 108–9.

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choleric man, and displayed both characteristics in each phase of his *curriculum vitae*: in his impatience to ‘renew the world’ he had pursued Charles V with unrelenting enmity, and his episcopal mode was not very different. He was not, he claimed with some complacency, a ‘bon compagno’. He was held by many, including another personal enemy, Pietro Aretino, to be a tyrannical destroyer of the good old ways of Italian Catholicism, the creator of a system of social espionage, a bringer of discord and hatred into the city of Romeo and Juliet. Aretino was no great advertisement for his cause, but we need to think about it: it launches a number of themes which will return in due course.⁷

Giberti was certainly conscious that peacemaking was one of the duties of a bishop; he may not have thought that he was very good at it, since in Verona itself he gave the job to one of his canons, the cathedral organist.⁸ Like most people in the sixteenth century, when he set down what he meant by charity he put the settlement of enmities at the end of a list of works of public beneficence.⁹ He made the momentous innovation of the *liber pro descriptione animarum*, later *status animarum*, which he told his curates to keep. This was a nominal roll of those in their charge, with a record of whether they had fulfilled their obligation of Easter confession and communion: a list of those who had not was to be kept and used to enforce conformity. This surgical intervention laid open the heart of our matter, since enmity was one of the two principal reasons for absence from communion: the other was sexual or marital trouble, which is not in itself

⁷ Adriano Prosperi, *Tra Evangelismo e Controriforma: G. M. Giberti* (Rome, 1969), especially chaps. 2 and 4; on Aretino, *ibid.*, pp. xvi, 105–6, 292–3; Barry Collett, *Italian Benedictine Scholars and the Reformation* (Oxford, 1985), pp. vii–viii, 112–13, shows that Aretino was no traditionalist, just an enemy of Giberti.

⁸ A. Fasani (ed.), *Riforma pretridentina della diocesi di Verona: visite pastorali del vescovo G. M. Giberti, 1525–1542* (3 vols., single pagination, Vicenza, 1989), p. xcix.

⁹ Prosperi, *Giberti*, pp. 265–6, 205–6 (formula of visitation).

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our business. A party who was ‘out of charity’ with another, who would not abandon what were called the signs of rancour, might not have his sins absolved or participate in the rite of ‘common union’, the Lord’s supper. Giberti’s sanction for non-communicating was severe: public excommunication by name, by the priest at mass, meaning not simply exclusion from the sacraments but expulsion from church and social ostracism, and expressed in the most aggressive terms (‘cutting out putrid members’). The time offenders were given to come round was, at least at the beginning, no more than a week or two. I quote Adriano Prosperi: ‘With the institution of the *liber animarum* as an instrument for continual recourse to a severe practice of excommunication, the settlement of disputes and irregular situations was entrusted definitively, no longer to the sacrament as a vehicle of moral economy, but to ecclesiastical authority [as such].’ Giberti added to the grounds for instant excommunication irreverent behaviour in church and standing outside during mass.¹⁰

Strictly interpreted, this programme would, as Giberti’s enemies complained, have left the diocese after one of his visitations in a state of social trauma. When he began to visit in person, in 1530, he toned it down somewhat, proved more amenable to the recommendation of priests for delay, and distinguished between sexual irregularities and problems of *inimicitia*. In the limited time he had available when visiting three or four parishes a day, he did use his authority to act as a peacemaker. So his bark was worse than his bite; but it was his bark that was transmitted to posterity.¹¹ There is also a central point of theology that may be

¹⁰ Fasani, *Visite*, introduction, pp. cx–cxii, cxxiv–cxxv; text, pp. 93, 372 (time), 499, 636, 794 (language); 669, 681 (church behaviour), and *passim*. Prosperi, ‘Le visite pastorali del Giberti’, in *ibid.*, p. lvi, quoted.

¹¹ These are my conclusions from Fasani, *Visite*, pp. 447–828, which record Giberti’s personal visitations from April to November 1530: peacemaking, pp. 553, 562, 584, 657, 742, 808 and *passim*. Prosperi, *Giberti*, p. 261.

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relevant to Giberti's work. He himself was not what is called a 'spirituale', a person who, like his colleague Reginald Pole, had taken on board the doctrine of justification by faith alone; but many of his team of helpers could be so described, and one of them was his preacher and popular educator Tullio Crispoldi. Crispoldi published a commentary on 'Forgive us our trespasses'; the Veronese may have had, as I do, some difficulty in following him, but he appears to have interpreted the text as a quixotic gesture by God to accept what was intrinsically a matter of civil convenience as worthy of his grace; an incentive to devout contemplation of God's generosity and to a life of other good works. This sounds more like Ockham than Luther; but it touches on two influences which are fundamental to our story, the pull of Reformation theology and the push of Renaissance civility. It embodied what Giberti had said when preaching, and I take it to reveal a good deal of uncertainty about the moral tradition.¹²

It is not usual to diagnose uncertainty in the doings of the Society of Jesus, whose operations were getting under way as Giberti's were finishing, and that is not exactly what I have to propose. The Society will have a part in the story, and often a positive one: surprisingly, to me at least, because I had not thought, and Evennett's analysis of the Jesuit ethos had not suggested, that it had peacemaking much on its mind. One had underestimated the flexibility of the institution and its founder; nevertheless, this may be one of the cases where flexibility borders upon incoherence. Ignatius was a 'spiritual' in his own way, which was not the way of the Lutherophiles or of Erasmus, but the way of a fifteenth-century *dévo*t whose favourite reading was the *Imitation of Christ*; and I see nothing wrong in making a distinction in

¹² Crispoldi's *Alcune ragioni del perdonare*, cited in Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, p. 40.

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fifteenth-century piety between the devotional and the social.¹³ The activism with which Ignatius transformed the *devotio moderna* was an activism of works: works of charity, works of mercy. A programme of works designed to help 'souls' to a salvation which was to be achieved by infusing the church's sacraments into converted individuals did not focus attention on charity in the sense of the moral tradition. There is nothing about it in the Spiritual Exercises or the original documents of the Jesuit 'institute', little or nothing in the pre-history of the Society. In its mode of life and its dealings in the world, the ties that bound were simply not its thing; in Ignatius's meditation on that part of the Nativity story which recorded a second crux of the moral tradition (after the Paternoster), the angels say: 'Glory to God in the highest', but do *not* say: 'Peace on earth to men of goodwill'.¹⁴

Peacemaking first appears in the expanded version of the *Formula Instituti* of 1550, ten years after the foundation: here, *dissidentium reconciliatio* (reconciliation of those at dispute) is put down as one of the works of charity the Society exists to promote.¹⁵ It seems pretty clear what had happened. Early Jesuits sent out on preaching tours in the towns and villages of central Italy had found themselves invited to arrange the public ceremonies of peacemaking which would have been expected to occur in the preaching tours of the friars. They had come to flush out Protestants and sympathisers, to teach catechism, to preach penitence and confession; they meant, one way and another, to generate interior conversion. They found that what amounted to

¹³ 'Prayers', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 1 (1991), p. 138; cf. the remarks of Virginia Reinburg, pp. 148ff.

¹⁴ *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola*, para. 264 (in the translation by T. Corbishley, Wheathampstead, 1973, p. 87); Evennett, *Spirit of the Counter-Reformation*, p. 36.

¹⁵ John O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1993), pp. 165–71.

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conversion for most of their hearers was the visible reconciliation of public hostilities, the throwing down of weapons, the kiss of peace. The principal voice in favour of accommodation to the demand was that of Silvestro Landini; it was well received at headquarters, I guess as an orthodox and popular alternative to the preaching of virtual justification by faith which had been the message of the *spirituali*. Thereafter, as Jesuits continued to serve as ‘missionaries’ to what they thought of as an indigenous Indies, peacemaking became a standard item of their work and propaganda.¹⁶ But it may be significant that Landini’s is not a famous name in the conventional annals of the Society, for there is a problem about Jesuit peacemaking, which is not really a ‘work’ in the same sense as their other enterprises. It got under the wire as one of the spiritual works of mercy, two of which, converting the sinner and instructing the ignorant, were central to Ignatius’s inspiration. But peacemaking is not actually one of them: they include the patient bearing of wrongs and the forgiveness of injuries, which are something else. If we take it in under this rubric we need to remember that mercy ‘is distinguished from love and kindness, as connoting in its object a certain inferiority . . . It excludes the idea of equality between giver and receiver.’ It drops, indeed, as the gentle rain from heaven, but upon the place beneath.¹⁷ Peace, as we are to understand it here, is not at all like

¹⁶ Adriano Prospero, ‘Il missionario’, in R. Villari (ed.), *L’uomo barocco* (Bari, 1991), pp. 211–18; and *idem*, *Tribunali della coscienza. Inquisitori, confessori, missionari* (Turin, 1996), pp. 551–5, 568ff (where he is called Cristoforo: were there two of them?); David Gentilcore, ‘“Adapt Yourself to the People’s Capacities”: Missionary Strategies, Methods and Impact in the Kingdom of Naples, 1600–1800’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 45 (1994), pp. 269–96.

¹⁷ O’Malley, *The First Jesuits*, pp. 88, 166. I have failed to find any historical account of the spiritual works of mercy, which seem to be a late mediaeval compilation. H. R. Mackintosh, art. *Mercy* in J. Hastings, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, VIII (Edinburgh, 1915).