



Session 5: Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation

“ I also say that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.”

MATTHEW 16:18

Q: How did the Roman Catholic Church react to the Protestant Reformation?

- A. Earlier Developments – reforms by Wycliffe, Huss, Savonarola, Erasmus and others failed to persuade the Pope to reform either doctrine or practice – the Reformation forced the church to act. The question was whether the RCC reforms would bring the groups closer or separate them further.
- B. Four Basic Responses – the official response was delayed by a number of factors both political and religious and it came about 18 years after Luther’s original protest – 4 responses dominated
 1. The Inquisition - dates from 12th century - Torquemada (1420-98), 10K+ killed - Ximenez (1436-1517) 2,000 killed. Catharii & Waldenses - accountable to the pope and worked with secular authorities to arrest people - very ingenious torture devices administered against 1,000s during the inquisitions - RCC states 10-20K - Anabaptists estimate in millions - in 1490s Ferdinand and Isabella wanted to use Inquisition against heretics, also against Jews and Muslims in Spain, Spanish Inquisition - operated under the anonymity of witnesses and presumption of guilt - "matter of faith" - Seville 1781 last burning at the stake (events leading up to French Revolution) - 1834 the last Inquisitor was dismissed
 2. The Jesuits – AKA: Society of Jesus - new religious order founded – added fourth vow to traditional ones of chastity, poverty and obedience to superiors – vowed absolute allegiance to the Pope – AKA: the “Pope’s stormtroopers” – participated in the inquisition, education and missions - **Ignatius Loyola** (1491-1556) – former Spanish nobleman – arch enemies of the Reformers – fanatical devotion - **Francis Xavier** (1506-1552) – most famous missionary – India, Japan, China **Matthew Ricci** (1552-1610) – missionary to China – scientist and syncretist
 3. Index of Prohibited Books – was a list of Protestant books Catholics could not read – the list was in effect until Vatican II – (1966) – it was revoked because the feared people would read them
 4. The Council of Trent – (1543-1563) – called by Pope Paul III as the 19th “ecumenical council” of the RCC - three sessions – two goals: repudiate Protestant theology and reorganize the church
 - a) Reforms of the Church – founded seminaries, advocated preaching, rules for conduct
 - b) Doctrinal Decisions – condemned Protestant doctrine, affirmed Apocrypha, pronounced Vulgate inspired, affirmed 7 sacraments, authority of tradition over Scripture, syncretistic salvation, reaffirmed transubstantiation & Purgatory
- C. Later Developments -
 1. St. Bartolomew’s Day Massacre (1572) – ambush of French Calvinists (Huguenots) by gov’t
 2. Edict of Nantes (1598) – proclaimed religious tolerance for Huguenots after series of civil wars
 3. Thirty Years War and the Peace of Westphalia – Protestant/Catholic conflict (1618-1648) in area around Germany – great loss of life – last of the religious wars on the Continent – treaty in 1648 permitted different sides to co-exist in same regions – extended tolerance – major deal
- D. Central Issues
 1. Proper Source of Authority
 2. Proper View of Salvation
 3. Proper View of the Church

Conclusion: The Roman Catholic Church tried in vain to respond to and contain the Protestant Reformation and the positions of both groups, due to irreconcilable theological differences, solidified into a permanent separation during the period between 1517 and 1648, the Age of Reformation.