

THE  
COUNTER-  
REFORMATION

## **The Counter-Reformation**

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Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church

201 Pandan Gardens, Singapore 609337

Website: [calvarypandan.sg](http://calvarypandan.sg)

Email: [enquiry@calvarypandan.sg](mailto:enquiry@calvarypandan.sg)

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# FOREWORD

According to **Jude 3**, the battle for the Christian Faith will rage on: “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” To earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints must remain the courageous duty of every believer at every age. The day it ends is when Christ returns to judge this world and cast out every evil to begin His one thousand-year reign. Until this glorious event of Christ’s reign, every believer must keep fighting the good fight of faith.

The 16th Century Reformation was a day of a new awakening of Christianity that had been kept under the destructive and powerful cloak of the Roman Catholic yoke. The Word of God was kept from the people because a law was passed that anyone who translated the Word of God into any language without the permission of the Roman Catholic Church would be put to death. Men like William Tyndale were killed for translating the Bible into the English language. Thank God the Reformation spread from Guttenberg, Germany to the rest of Europe and the world.

The Roman Catholic Church did not take this protest lying down and initiated a Counter-Reformation to stop the impact of the Reformation. “The Counter-Reformation (Latin: *Contrareformatio*),

also sometimes called the Catholic Revival,[1] was the period of Catholic resurgence that was initiated in response to, and as an alternative to, the Protestant Reformations at the time. It is frequently dated to have begun with the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and to end with the conclusion of the European wars of religion in 1648, though this is controversial.[2] The broader term Catholic Reformation (Latin: *Reformatio Catholica*) also encompasses reforms and movements within the Church in the periods immediately before Protestantism or Trent and lasting later.” (Wikipedia)

What is the face of Christianity today compared to the face of Christianity in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century? Does the face of Christianity today reflect our Holy Saviour according to Holy Scriptures?

*Christianity Today*, dated 7 July 2015, reported that Pope Francis apologised to the oldest evangelical church. “On the part of the Catholic Church, I ask your forgiveness, I ask it for the non-Christian and even inhuman attitudes and behavior that we have showed you...”. Francis said during the first-ever visit by a pope to a Waldensian church. “In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, forgive us!”

With this apology from the Pope, do we still need to remember and remind God’s people of the Reformation as if we have not accepted his apology?

*Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew*

# THE FRUITS OF THE 16<sup>th</sup> CENTURY REFORMATION

The 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Reformation is the greatest revival since Pentecost. More than 500 years have passed since the Reformation, and we are still enjoying the fruits of this great work of God. God has indeed worked a mighty work, and the flame of the Reformation still burns today. The Reformation has a profound and lasting impact on the world. Beyond the political and cultural impact, the Reformation's greatest impact was in the spiritual realm – it marked a return to the centrality of the Scriptures and the preaching of the Gospel.

## THE CENTRALITY OF THE WORD OF GOD

At the heart of the Reformation was the authority of the Word of God. It was the Bible and not the 95 thesis which sparked the Reformation. During the Dark Ages (AD 476-AD 1517), the Roman Catholic Church made it illegal for the ordinary person to read the Bible for themselves, especially if it were a translation not based on the Latin Vulgate. For example, in 1080, Pope Gregory VII prohibited the reading of the Bible that was available in an Old Slavonic translation. He wrote, “Not without reason has it pleased Almighty

God that Holy Scripture should be a secret in certain places, lost, if it were plainly apparent to all men, perchance it would be little esteemed and be subject to disrespect; or it might be falsely understood by those of mediocre learning, and lead to error.”<sup>1</sup>

In response to the restrictions of the Roman Catholic Church, movements such as the Waldensians and the Lollards were raised by the Lord to preserve the scriptures and to translate them into the common language.

In about 1170, recognising that the Word of God ought to be the basis of his faith and practice, Peter Waldo started employing men to translate the Bible. Nine years later, he gathered a group of men and women who desired to bring the truth of the Bible to others. The members of this group of men and women were named the Waldenses or Waldensians after their leader. This group would take up the task of translating, teaching and preaching the Word of God. They believed and were convinced that the preached Word of God (and not the sacraments) was necessary for salvation. Consequently, the opposition of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.truthmagazine.com/archives/volume4/TM004054.htm>

the Roman Church and their insistence on preaching the Word of God stirred up the wrath of the Roman Church which led to their excommunication and persecution.

During a time when the Bible was not allowed to be read by anyone except by Roman Catholic priests, the Waldensians stood so strongly on the Word of God that the Roman Church felt threatened. The Church saw how the movement had grown in popularity and attacked the teachings and traditions of the Church. This resulted in the Inquisition, which was a cruel and severe persecution campaign against the Waldensians – one of the most cruel and ruthless persecutions in history which lasted for centuries. Such was the hatred of the Roman Church against the Waldensians. It was so vehement that Pope Alexander III commanded the bishop of Lyons to exterminate the Waldensians “from the face of the earth.”<sup>2</sup> In order to escape persecution, the Waldensians fled to the Piedmont Valleys for refuge.

The Lollards were another group that was influenced by the Reformers’ emphasis on the authority of Scripture. In about 1380, Wycliffe began training a group of people, made up of Oxford graduates and laymen, who became known as the Lollards and sent them forth as itinerant evangelists to spread the Gospel of Christ. Wycliffe introduced many theological and practical reforms. He preached against the pope, bishops and friars, and warned the people against the deceptions of the Roman Church. He condemned the teachings of indulgences, transubstantiation, and the false ideas behind pilgrimages and

papal infallibility. He was the first to call the Pope Antichrist. However, one of the most significant contributions Wycliffe made to the church was his translation of the New Testament into English from the Latin Vulgate in 1382. He wanted to see the Bible accessible to the common English people. During the same year, his views were condemned in London and he retreated to Lutterworth. There, he never stopped labouring to spread the truth of God. Wycliffe died of a stroke on 28 Dec, 1384 but his influence did not die with him. The Lollards’ preaching of the Gospel of Christ would reach Bohemia, where it would influence a man named John Huss.

The 15<sup>th</sup> Century saw a renewed interest in the study of classical languages such as Greek and Hebrew, and together with the invention of the printing press in the 15<sup>th</sup> the Lord was establishing the pillar of *sola scriptura* or “Scripture alone”, which would be the hallmark of the Reformation. In 1516, Erasmus published the Greek New Testament, enabling God’s people to study His Word in the original languages. With the availability of the New Testament in Greek, God’s people no longer have to rely on the Latin Vulgate.

It was through the study of the Greek New Testament that Luther recognised the errors of the Roman Catholic Church and it was also through the Word of God that he rediscovered the doctrine of justification by faith alone through the work of Christ on the cross. Recognising the importance of the Word of God, Luther translated the New Testament

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<sup>2</sup> Foxe’s book of Martyrs, chapter 4

from Greek into German when he was in hiding in the Wartburg castle, in 1522. In 1534, Luther finished translating the entire Bible into German. His work of translation would influence Tyndale to translate the Bible into English.

When Huldrych Zwingli began his ministry in Zurich in 1519, one of the things he first did was to preach through the Bible, beginning from the Gospel of Matthew. This was unheard of in those days, as priests of local parishes were required to follow lectionary readings prescribed by the Roman Catholic Church. He continued preaching through the entire New Testament in an expository manner, going through the Bible, verse by verse and chapter by chapter. He defied the Catholic Church in 1522 in what is now known as the “sausage affair” where he refused to fast during Lent. This led to several disputations and the abolishment of the mass in Zurich in 1525. By returning to the Word of God, the Reformation had taken root in Zurich and Switzerland.

John Calvin, similarly, focused on the same thing in his ministry. During his time in Geneva, Calvin preached over 2000 expository sermons, which served as the basis for his commentaries on the Bible. Though Calvin may not have translated the Bible directly, he did reference the Greek and Hebrew Bible extensively in both his lectures and commentaries often providing a literal translation of these portions of the Bible. Calvin was greatly supportive of the translation of the Bible, writing the preface to two French translations of the Bible. In the preface to the French Bible of Olivétan,

Calvin wrote: “This is what is stated plainly in the next book (the New Testament), and set forth there openly. This book we have translated as faithfully as we were able according to the truth and the style of the Greek language, to enable all Christians, men and women, who know the French language, to understand and acknowledge the law they ought to obey and the faith they ought to follow.”<sup>3</sup>

The Bible Translation Movement was foundational to the work of the Reformation. It may even be said that without the Word of God being made widely available to God’s people, the Reformation would not have succeeded. The Reformation produced at least six translations of the Bible in the English language alone.

The Word of God was crucial to the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation movement. For the first time since the Dark Ages, the Pope, Church tradition, and the canons of the Roman Catholic Church were no longer regarded as the source of supreme authority. Instead, the principle of *Sola Scriptura* was established. This principle recognises that the Word of God alone has absolute authority over the Church and God’s people. The Roman Church recognised the threat of *Sola Scriptura*, which was why they moved quickly to prohibit the translation and distribution of the Word of God that had been translated into the common language of the people. This was an attempt to seize back authority. But the work of God cannot be stopped; despite the attempts to stifle the influence of the Word of God, the Bible have since been translated

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom.iv.html>

to over 700 languages and distributed throughout the whole world.

## THE FORMULATION OF CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS

With the recognition of the authority of God's Word came the development of creeds and confessions of faith. A confession of faith is a public declaration of what one believes in concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. As a written document, a confession of faith is an officially adopted statement of what a body of believers believes in.

As the Reformers stood against the Roman Catholic Church, they saw the value and importance of drafting these statements of faith to instruct the laity in the Gospel and for the defence of the Gospel. They would help the laity to understand the doctrines of the Word of God. These statements of faith were employed to provide doctrinal clarity as they delineated and defined what the Reformers believed in. The Reformers always understood that these confessions were subordinate to the Bible. The Bible is the only supreme, infallible, authoritative rule of faith and practice. The usefulness and reliability of confessions of faith lie in their faithfulness and truthfulness to the Bible. The Bible is Inspired and Preserved by God; the Confession is an exposition of God's Word. The conscience of the believer is bound to the Scriptures alone. Confessions are, therefore, not to be regarded as the rule of faith and practice but as help to both.

The Augsburg Confession was one of the first protestant confessions composed since the nailing of Luther's 95 theses. In 1530, Emperor Charles V had called

upon German princes to a diet (a formal deliberative assembly) in Augsburg to present their religious positions in his attempt to put an end to ecclesiastical dissensions that had arisen out of the Catholic-Protestant debate. Catholic princes had refused to submit any statements, claiming that they did not need to defend their position as it has always been the historic position. On the side of the Protestants, the prince-electors, John of Saxony, had directed theologians of Wittenberg, including Martin Luther and Philipp Melancthon, to meet in Torgau so that they might present a summary of the doctrine of the Reformation. There, the "Torgau Articles" were first formulated, which would be used to write the Augsburg Confession. Because of the historical context of how the Augsburg Confession came to be written, it continues to carry great historical and doctrinal importance. It has since been adopted as one of the primary confessions of faith of the Lutheran Church, and remains an essential document of the Protestant Reformation.

In 1536, when Geneva declared that they were on the side of the Protestants. The Genevan Confession was formulated. This Confession was credited to John Calvin in 1536 by Theodore Beza, who said Calvin wrote it as a formula of Christian doctrine that was presented to the city senate. The Reformed faith is a confession faith, where the Reformed tradition is not satisfied with just stating what they believe once or that another country has stated this position. Rather, there is a constant desire to express what they believe clearly.

The Belgic Confession was authored by Guido de Brès, an itinerant preacher of

the Netherlands, who was persecuted and died a martyr in 1567. He began this work in 1559 and in 1561 presented this as a defence for persecuted Reformed Christians. He wanted to show that the Reformed Church abide by the law and submits to the civil magistrate.

The Scots Confession was formulated in 1560. This confession was written by six leaders of the Protestant Reformation in Scotland. The Parliament of Scotland wanted to reform the religion of the country. John Knox, together with other Reformed theologians, were commissioned to produce a confession clearly expressing the Christian faith. It was approved by Parliament on 27 August 1560. The Church of Scotland continued using the Scots Confession until it was replaced by the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1647.

The Second Helvetic Confession was formulated by Henry Bullinger in 1562 and later revised in 1564. It was initially drafted as a personal confession. When Frederick II, the Elector of Palatinate, requested for a statement of the Reformed faith, Bullinger provided him with a copy of his work which was subsequently translated to German and published. This is an important work as it expresses Reformed Theology in a very clear and comprehensive manner.

The Heidelberg Catechism was written in 1564 by Zacharius Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus. Elector Frederick III had commissioned this work as he wanted a Reformed catechism which served the purpose of instructing young people and to guide pastors and teachers.

The Westminster Standards were formulated out of a desire to reform and restructure the Church of England. The first meeting of the Westminster Assembly was held in Westminster Abbey, London, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, 1643. The Assembly consisted of 151 members (10 Lords, 20 Commoners, and 121 Divines). The divines were very competent men, as competent as any assembly in history. They were made up of pastors, theologians, and scholars. The Assembly took about five years and six months to complete the Westminster Standards. They held at least 1163 sessions in total. The Form of Church Government and Directory of Public Worship were the first to be completed towards the end of 1644. The Westminster Confession of Faith was completed on December 3, 1646. A revision was made later with Scripture proofs of each separated proposition attached on the margin, this was completed on April 29, 1647. The Shorter Catechism was finished on November 5, 1647 and the Larger Catechism on April 14, 1648.

The publishing of these Reformed confessions and other books threatened the Roman Catholic Church. These confessions which often referred directly to Scriptures, exposed the errors of the Catholic Church. They challenged the authority of the Catholic Church and they accompanied the breaking away of various nations from the control of the Catholic Church.

## **THE GOSPEL PREACHED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD**

One of the hallmarks of the Reformation was its evangelistic emphasis. The message of the Gospel was not contained in Germany. Luther and the other reformers

trained preachers and pastors and sent them throughout Europe with the Gospel of Christ. Through Luther's preaching and writings, the Gospel spread throughout Bohemia, Moravia, Hungry, Austria and Slovakia. Calvin similarly was very mission-minded. He trained pastors and teachers in Geneva and sent them out to preach the Gospel reaching places as far as Brazil.

Through the preaching of the Gospel in all these countries, Roman Catholicism was beginning to lose its foothold. Many of these countries that were once controlled by the Catholic Church were now breaking away from it. By the 1560s, countries such as Germany, Scandinavia, Switzerland, Holland, Poland, France, Bohemia, Hungary and England, were no longer under the control of the Catholic Church. Instead, through the preaching of the Gospel, protestant Churches were growing in influence in these places. In those days, the Roman Catholic controlled both people and kings through fear. Fear was a very powerful instrument that was used to control the minds of the people, and there is nothing more frightening than to have no hope after death. Monarchs and people alike wrongly thought that salvation could only be found in the Catholic Church. They feared that if they were to disobey the pope or oppose the traditions of the Church in anyway, that they would be excommunicated – in their minds, to be excommunicated from the Catholic Church was as good as being condemned to hell. Through the preaching of the Gospel, the hearts, minds and consciences of the people were now freed from the bondage of the Catholic Church. They understood that salvation is found in

Christ alone, and that eternal life is secured through the finished work of Christ. With this assurance, they were able to stand against the Catholic Church.

An example of such a stand against the Catholic Church is seen in work of the Reformation that unfolded in the city of Geneva. Through the ministry of Huldrych Zwingli, by the early 1520s, Switzerland had started to break away from the control of the Catholic Church. During that same time, protestant refugees started leaving France for cities such as Geneva. Amongst them was the French Reformer, William Farel, who had started to preach the Gospel in Geneva. Geneva soon expelled Catholic priests and bishop from its city and in 1536, it declared itself a protestant city. Though there were several attempts to turn Geneva back to Catholicism, through the ministry of John Calvin, Geneva remained a bastion of the Faith. In 1541, the Catholic Cardinal Jacopo Sadoletto had written an eloquent and power letter to the city council of Geneva, calling them to return to the Catholic faith. The city council asked Calvin to write a response to Sadoletto, to which Calvin responded with his *Responsio ad Sadoletum*, where he defended Geneva's position and, more importantly, expressed the fundamental differences between Catholics and Protestants and showed the Biblical basis of the Protestant Faith. Luther was said to have rejoiced when he read Calvin's response.

## CONCLUSION

The Lord had worked a mighty work through the Protestant Reformation. The Word of God and the Gospel was preached far and wide. Even today, we are still

experiencing the fruits of the Reformation. But as we see throughout history, when the Lord works, the devil will also work, seeking to hinder the work of the Lord.

In response to the Reformation, the Catholic Church launched the Counter-Reformation movement in an attempt to thwart the Protestant advance. Through aggressive reforms and strategic measures, the Catholic Church regained control in Poland and retained its influence in modern-day Belgium. By 1590, the papacy had “succeeded” in slowing down the influence of the Protestant Reformation, especially in southern and eastern Europe.

How did the Counter-Reformation of the Catholic Church achieve such a significant turnaround? To better understand effectiveness of the Counter-Reformation’s efforts, it is essential to examine the Catholic Church’s reactions. We will do so in the following articles.

The Catholic Church today still has the same agenda and goal as it did 400 years ago. Their method may have changed, but its objective has not changed. But by the grace of God, the light of the Reformation has not been snuffed out. The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ must still be defended against every attempt to suppress it.

# THE BACKGROUND TO THE COUNTER-REFORMATION

## INTRODUCTION

The 16<sup>th</sup> century was a period of significant transformation for the papacy, driven by the rise of the Protestant Reformation movement. The Reformation challenged the authority and practices of the Papacy on a fundamental level. Yet, even before the rise of the Reformation Movement, dissatisfaction was already growing within the Catholic Church. Criticisms were directed at the perceived moral decay within the clergy, the opulence of the Vatican, and controversial practices like the sale of indulgences. There were, therefore, efforts to reform the Church internally pre-Luther. Yet, these reforms did not focus on the spiritual and doctrinal problems of the Catholic Church, but were mainly administrative and superficial. They were also, for the most part, unsuccessful. The Reformation challenged the Roman Catholic Church on a fundamental level, a challenge it could no longer ignore nor suppress. The Catholic Church had to respond to the Reformation, and it had to do so swiftly.

## THE PROBLEMS WITH THE PAPACY

By the time Luther nailed his ninety-five theses, corruption was already deeply entrenched within the papacy. Leaders

within the Catholic Church were seen living carnally, often indulging in gluttony and luxury. When Luther visited Rome in 1511, he had a high regard for Rome. Rome was supposed to be a powerful city which was regarded as the centre of Catholicism, but he was horrified by the corruption which he witnessed there. Simony, which was the selling of church offices, was also rampant. Nepotism was a problem—popes often appointed friends and relatives to positions of influence. Scandals also plagued the Church. Pope Alexander VI was accused of fathering children while he was a cardinal. Bishops were frequently struggling for power in the Church. Three bishops had simultaneously claimed to be the true Bishop of Rome. The issue was so serious that it created a split in the Catholic Church. This split became known as the Western Schism, which lasted from 1378-1417. Popes were often deeply involved in political affairs in their eagerness for financial gain. They wielded control over secular rulers, using them as pawns to fulfil their ambitions.

Prior to the Reformation, several Popes had also become more interested in the arts than in any ministerial work. Many of them embarked on elaborate and expensive

building projects wanting to leave their legacy through art. They turned Rome into a centre of art, science and politics. Pope Nicholas V (1447-55), for example, was more concerned for the revival of classical studies than for any spiritual revival.

Pope Julius II (1503–13) was often regarded “prince” rather than a priest, because of his love for war and politics. In 1507, Pope Julius II permitted the sale of indulgences to raise money to build St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. At that time, Rome was in financial difficulties, and building a Cathedral was expensive. The Church was bankrupt and needed money. Pope Leo X, who succeeded Pope Julius II, realised that there was a solution in Germany that could solve the Church’s problem of money. In 1513, Pope Leo X renewed that approval to raise money through the sale of indulgences at the same time, allowed someone to pay for the Bishopric. Albrecht of Mainz had lofty ambitions and sought the Bishopric of Mainz and so Albrecht and Pope Leo X settled on a price for the Bishopric and all Albrecht needed to do was to raise funds for it. Albrecht didn’t have the money for the Bishopric, and therefore, he sought permission from Pope Leo to sell indulgences to the German people on the condition that half the money raised would go to the Vatican. This money would go to the building of St. Peter’s Basilica. Albrecht then hired a Dominican Friar, Johann Tetzel, to travel through Germany to sell indulgences. Tetzel went around selling indulgences with the jingle which he sang, “once a coin into the coffer clings, the soul from purgatory springs.” Luther was greatly troubled by the sale of indulgences, compelling him to draft his ninety-five theses to challenge such a practice. The

papacy in such a condition was not ready to respond to the work of the Reformation.

### THE ORATORY OF DIVINE LOVE

Towards the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, there were some who recognised the need for a reform of the Catholic Church. About 50 or 60 devout Catholics had gathered together to discuss the reforms that the Catholic Church needed. This movement became known as the “Oratory of Divine Love.” An “Oratory” was a part of the Catholic Church’s structure, where a group was set aside by ecclesiastical authority for prayer and worship. They sought to cultivate personal piety by prescribing a fixed program of prayers, weekly fasts, monthly confessions, and partaking in communion.

Although those within this Oratory agreed that a reform of the Church was needed, they disagreed amongst themselves concerning the methods and approach to such a reform. By the time of the Reformation, this Oratory disagreed sharply on how they would respond to the Protestant Reformation. The response to the Protestant Reformation was slow, partly because the Catholic Church could not agree on the response they would adopt. Two competing groups were around within the Oratory—one led by Cardinal Contarini and the other by Cardinal Caraffa. Contarini led a group known as the *spirituali* who wanted to seek reconciliation with the Reformers. They saw the need for reform and thought it may be brought about internally. Some within this group even believed in the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ alone and were regarded as more progressive. The other faction led by Caraffa became known as the *zelanti* (zealots) and were

also convinced of the need for reform. Still, they wanted a different response to the Protestant Reformation. They regarded the protestants as heretics and sought to suppress the Protestant Reformation, even through the use of force.

Caraffa gained more followers and support than Contarini, becoming the advisor to Pope Paul III.

### **REFORMS WITHIN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

Paul III was decisive in his response to the Protestant Reformation. Together with Caraffa, he launched an aggressive counterattack against the Protestants. Paul III established a reform commission seeking to bring about reforms within the Church. He sought to reform the College of Cardinals, which had become corrupted and often served as the tool used by bishops to consolidate their power. Since the College would elect to appoint new popes, bishops would appoint Cardinals who supported them into the College.

Paul III convened the Council of Trent in 1545. This council would meet from 1545 to 1563 and was instrumental in initiating and implementing various administrative

reforms, including the reform of the papacy itself. He also approved the institution of the Order of the Jesuits, which was fiercely loyal to the papacy and which played a key role during the Inquisition. Seminaries were also founded to train priests in the Catholic tradition. Caraffa was instrumental in reinstating the Inquisition in 1542. When he became Pope Paul IV (1555-1559) in 1555, he was determined to eliminate Protestantism, taking the Inquisition to another level of torture and cruelty. He also imposed a list of prohibited books primarily aimed at restricting the writings of the Protestant Reformers. This list also included many editions of the Bible.

### **CONCLUSION**

It must be noted that the reforms which the Catholic Church sought to initiate were focused on consolidating its power and preventing the spread of Protestantism. Many of these reforms implemented within the Church were administrative and not spiritual. Where doctrines are concerned, they made no reforms but continued to abide by their traditions. Instead of self-examination, the Catholic Church was more concerned with dealing with the spread of the Reformation.

# THE JESUITS

## THE FORMATION OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS: A PILLAR OF THE COUNTER-REFORMATION

The Counter-Reformation was the Roman Catholic Church's response to the challenges posed by the Protestant Reformation, seeking to address internal corruption and combat the growing influence of Protestantism in Europe. One of the most powerful tools of the Counter-Reformation was the creation of new religious orders dedicated to the revival of Catholic orthodoxy. Among these, the Society of Jesus, or the Jesuits, became the most influential. Founded by Ignatius Loyola in 1540, the Jesuits were marked by their rigorous discipline, educational mission, and global reach. Under Loyola's guidance, the Jesuits became key agents of the Catholic Church's efforts to reform itself and resist Protestantism.

## IGNATIUS LOYOLA: A LIFE DEDICATED TO THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE PAPACY

Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556) was born into a noble family in the Basque region of Spain. After a life as a soldier, Loyola experienced a profound religious conversion while recovering from a severe injury sustained in battle (1521). He found

inspiration in reading about the lives of saints and decided to dedicate his life in service as a “soldier of God.” Loyola's spiritual journey led him to develop the *Spiritual Exercises* (1548), a meditative process of prayer and reflection aimed at discerning God's will. This process would later become foundational to the Jesuits' spiritual training.

In 1534, Loyola, along with six companions, took vows of perpetual chastity, poverty, and obedience, and pledged to serve the Pope in whatever capacity was required. Six years later, Pope Paul III formally approved the formation of the Society of Jesus. The Jesuits were to be a mobile, disciplined, and spiritually rigorous order that would directly counter the Protestant Reformation and evangelise non-Christian lands. Their work eventually extended far beyond the borders of Europe, reaching the most distant corners of the world.

## ENGAGED IN MISSIONARY WORK: SPREADING ACROSS THE GLOBE

One of the key missions of the Jesuits was global evangelisation. From the outset, Loyola envisioned his order spreading Catholicism far beyond Europe, and by the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, Jesuit missionaries were active in places as distant as Japan, Ontario,

Paraguay, and Ethiopia. Men like Francis Xavier, one of the original companions of Loyola, became instrumental in this global mission. Xavier famously travelled to India and Japan, tirelessly working to convert local populations and establish Catholic communities.

The Jesuits' missionary work was notable for its adaptability and cultural sensitivity. They studied local languages and customs, often integrating aspects of the local culture into their presentation of Catholicism to make the faith more accessible to indigenous peoples. In China, for example, the Jesuits, most famously Matteo Ricci, gained the respect of the imperial court by mastering Chinese culture and Confucian philosophy and being one of the first Western sinologists. This approach allowed them to engage deeply with intellectuals and rulers in foreign lands, spreading the influence of Catholicism far beyond Europe.

#### **ESTABLISHING SCHOOLS: SHAPING MINDS IN THE CATHOLIC TRADITION**

Education was central to the Jesuit mission. Loyola and his followers believed that the future of Catholicism depended on a well-educated clergy and laity. To achieve this, they established schools, colleges, and universities throughout Europe and in their missionary territories. Jesuit educational institutions emphasised a rigorous classical education rooted in Catholic theology, but also included studies in philosophy, science, and the arts, making them among the finest schools of the time.

These schools played a crucial role in the Counter-Reformation, counterbalancing

the Protestant emphasis on individual interpretation of scripture. By educating both the clergy and the laity in Catholic doctrine, the Jesuits sought to strengthen the Church's intellectual foundation. They promoted a curriculum that reinforced Catholic orthodoxy, particularly emphasising loyalty to the papacy, which had been challenged by Protestant reformers. The Jesuits' educational institutions became a cornerstone of Catholic intellectual life, attracting students from across Europe and helping to form a new generation of Catholic leaders.

#### **ENFORCING CATHOLIC ORTHODOXY: SUPPRESSING THE PROTESTANTISM MOVEMENT**

In addition to their missionary work and educational efforts, the Jesuits were also tasked with defending the Catholic Church from the spread of Protestantism. The Society of Jesus became one of the most effective instruments of the Counter-Reformation, using all means necessary to stop the advance of Protestantism. In this regard, they took on an uncompromising stance, becoming involved in the Inquisition and other efforts to root out heresy.

Jesuits were frequently called upon to confront Protestant teachings through theological debate and public disputation. They engaged in polemical works to refute Protestant claims and sought to win back regions that had already adopted Protestantism. In places like Germany and Poland, they were particularly successful in reasserting Catholic influence. However, their efforts were not limited to intellectual persuasion. In many regions,

the Jesuits were complicit in or directly involved in the more coercive aspects of the Counter-Reformation, including the persecution, torture, and execution of Protestant heretics.

The Society of Jesus operated under a strict vow of obedience to the Pope, making them loyal servants of the papacy. This allegiance to the papal cause often put them at the forefront of the Church's efforts to suppress Protestantism. Their extensive networks of schools, missions, and political influence made them formidable opponents in the religious struggles of the time. In many cases, Jesuits worked closely with secular rulers to enforce Catholic orthodoxy, sometimes leading to violent suppression of Protestant movements.

## CONCLUSION

Ignatius Loyola's life and the formation of the Society of Jesus were crucial to the cause of the Counter-Reformation. The Jesuits became one of the most powerful and dynamic forces within the Catholic Church, known for their missionary zeal, commitment to education, and

determination to stop the spread of Protestantism. Whether in the far-flung reaches of Asia or the battlefields of Reformation Europe, the Jesuits carried out their work with discipline and devotion, serving as the Church's vanguard in a time of great religious upheaval. Their legacy continues today in their educational institutions and global mission, reflecting the far-reaching impact of their work during the Counter-Reformation.

The Bible has warned that all who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2 Tim 3:12). Persecution has been and will be the tool which Satan would use to tempt God's faithful servants to compromise their faith. Revelation 2:10 encourages us: *"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."* Many of God's servants have remained faithful in the past, despite the sufferings and persecutions which they suffered. We must learn from their example and remain faithful even in times of persecution.

# THE INQUISITION AND PROHIBITED BOOKS

## INTRODUCTION

In Revelation 12:13, we read: “And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.” After being cast out of heaven, the dragon, symbolising Satan, did not give up but continued his assault against God’s people. Satan relentlessly wages war against “the woman” (representing Israel), from whom “the man child” (representing Jesus Christ) came. His efforts to deceive and destroy will persist until his ultimate defeat when he will be “cast into the lake of fire and brimstone” (Revelation 20:10). The Devil’s nature is one of constant opposition—he will never stop trying to undermine God’s will and harm those who follow Him.

The Counter-Reformation, a significant movement in church history, represented the Roman Catholic Church’s effort to resist and reverse the advances of the Protestant Reformation. Just as Satan, after being cast out of heaven, did not admit defeat, he continued his opposition through the Roman Catholic Church’s counterattack against the Reformation. An examination of the Counter-Reformation reveals that the Devil does not fight blindly—

his methods are deliberate and strategic. Church history is far from a collection of random events; a closer examination reveals Satan’s deliberate and orchestrated schemes. Therefore, what happened to Christians in the past should not be seen as mere historical events but as outcomes of the ongoing spiritual warfare. By studying how the Devil has operated throughout history, Christians can learn valuable lessons. This knowledge helps believers recognise the ‘wiles of the Devil’ (Ephesians 6:11), preparing them to face their spiritual battles wisely with God’s help.

## A THREE-PRONGED APPROACH

Externally, the Catholic Church employed a three-pronged approach to counter the Reformation: 1) the Jesuits worked to persuade people back to Roman Catholicism; 2) the Inquisition instilled fear in those who dared to challenge the Catholic Church’s authority; and 3) the Index of Prohibited Books censored Protestant literature. Much like a military strategy that targets land, air, and sea, Satan wielded three distinct weapons through the Roman Catholic Church: 1) the weapon of persuasion (the Jesuits); 2) the weapon of fear (the Inquisition); and 3) the weapon

of censorship (the Index of Prohibited Books). Together, these forces aimed to suppress the Protestant movement and maintain Catholic dominance.

The Jesuits, the Inquisition, and the Index of Prohibited Books played complementary roles in combating Protestantism. The Jesuits, founded by Ignatius Loyola, were men focused on educating converted Catholics and persuading others to join the Catholic faith. They were key in missionary work, traveling to distant territories untouched by Catholicism. Meanwhile, the Inquisition acted as the powerful judicial arm of the Catholic Church, tasked with identifying, trying, and punishing those who opposed Catholic doctrine. Through imprisonment, torture, and execution, the Inquisition instilled fear. Thus, the Inquisition supported the Jesuits' efforts by deterring dissenters who dared to question or oppose their teachings.

The Index was a list of books that were banned by the Catholic Church because they were considered contradictory to the teachings of the Roman Catholics. It was established to prevent the spread of Protestant teachings and other forms of dissent against the papacy. By controlling access to information (censorship), the Index ensured that the Jesuits' teachings in spreading Catholic doctrine faced little competition from Protestant literature.

The purpose of this article is to examine how the Catholic Church, during the Counter-Reformation, employed the Inquisition (weapon of fear) and the Index of Prohibited Books (weapon of censorship) as key instruments used by the Devil to suppress the spread of Protestantism.

As Christians today, reflecting on these historical events can provide valuable insight into the tactics that Satan will continue to use against God's children.

## WEAPON OF FEAR – THE INQUISITION

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND KEY PERIODS

The term “Inquisition” comes from the Latin word *inquisitio*, meaning “inquiry” or “investigation.” In the context of the Counter-Reformation, the Inquisition refers to the judicial process employed by the Catholic Church to identify, investigate, and prosecute individuals accused of opposing its doctrines. This reaction was a direct response to the growing Protestant Reformation.

The Catholic Church's retaliation against the Protestant Reformation was launched even before Martin Luther nailed the “95 Theses” to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. The 16<sup>th</sup> century Protestant Reformation did not come about in one day, but it was the culmination of the efforts of pre-Reformers, which led to that pivotal moment. Whenever progress was made in the reformation of the Roman Catholic Church, Satan swiftly countered. Long before 1517, Inquisitions were tools used by the Roman Catholic Church to suppress dissent in response to the challenges the Catholic Church faced.

The history of the Inquisition spans several key phases, each marked by the Catholic Church's efforts to suppress opposition and maintain religious dominance. The Medieval Inquisition (12<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> centuries)

was the first of its kind. In Europe, the Medieval Inquisition was established to combat movements like the Waldensians, a Christian movement that criticised the wealth and corruption of the Catholic Church, emphasising personal piety and adherence to the Bible over papal authority. This Inquisition was not centralised but conducted by individual bishops.

Next came the Spanish Inquisition (established in 1478), which was notorious for its intensity. Its primary focus was on ensuring the genuineness of Jews and Muslims who converted to Catholicism. Later, the Spanish Inquisition also turned its attention to Protestant Christians. The Portuguese Inquisition (1536–1821) followed a similar model, focusing on Jews who converted to the Catholic faith. The Portuguese Inquisition scrutinised these converts, suspecting many of secretly practising Judaism. Additionally, it sought to identify and suppress any beliefs or practices in Portugal and its overseas territories that were deemed to deviate from official Catholic doctrine.

Lastly, the Roman Inquisition was founded in 1542 by Pope Paul III, primarily to combat the spread of Protestantism in Italy and beyond.

While the Inquisition spanned several centuries and took various phases, our focus will be primarily on the Spanish and Roman Inquisitions due to their pivotal roles in the Counter-Reformation. The Roman Inquisition, specifically created to combat Protestant heresy, marked the peak of inquisitorial activity. It resulted in significant territorial gains for the Catholic Church against Protestant expansion.

However, to better comprehend the Roman Inquisition, we must first examine its predecessor, the Spanish Inquisition, which laid the groundwork for many of its methods and structures.

These two Inquisitions were unparalleled in their scale and impact, exerting far-reaching influence across Europe and beyond. The Spanish Inquisition's influence extended throughout Spain's vast colonial empire, while the Roman Inquisition was instrumental in maintaining the Catholic Church's power in Italy and other parts of Europe. In terms of power and reach, the Spanish and Roman Inquisitions were the Catholic's most effective weapons against religious dissent.

## THE SPANISH INQUISITION (1478-1834)

By the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, Spain had emerged from centuries of Muslim rule over parts of the Iberian Peninsula (modern-day Spain and Portugal). Granada was the final stronghold of Muslim rule in southern Spain. With the conquest of Granada in 1492, Spain became a fully Catholic kingdom, and the Catholic Monarchs were eager to establish both religious and political unity across their realm.

During the reign of the Spanish monarch, Henry III (1390–1406), Jews faced increasing persecution and were pressured to convert to Catholicism. Many Jews, faced with the choice of conversion, death, or expulsion, became nominal converts to Catholicism—adopting the new religion in name only, without a genuine change in belief. These converted Jews, known as Conversos (Spanish for “converted”), and converted Muslims, known as

Moriscos, continued to face suspicion and discrimination. A significant population of Marranos—Jews who outwardly converted but secretly continued practising Judaism—was seen as a threat to Catholic Spain's religious unity.

Spanish monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella were resolute in pursuing political and religious unity, establishing Catholicism as the cornerstone of national identity. Religion became their political tool to solidify control over the kingdom. In 1478, with papal approval, they established the Spanish Inquisition to enforce adherence to Catholicism and investigate the sincerity of conversions. This institution would later play a central role in consolidating Catholic dominance and suppressing dissent within Spain. At this time, Italy was fragmented into various city-states, leaving Spain to emerge as the dominant champion of Catholicism. Spanish monarchs, such as Charles V and Philip II, devoted significant resources—both financial and military—to defending and promoting the papal system.

The Spanish Inquisition's organisation and methods were uniquely brutal and efficient, distinguishing it from other Inquisitions. Operating under the monarchy's authority and independent of the papacy, it was headed by the Grand Inquisitor, with tribunals spread across Spain. Tomás de Torquemada, the first Grand Inquisitor, became infamous for his ruthless pursuit of individuals who were perceived to be enemies of the Catholic Church. The Inquisition relied on public trials, torture, and executions—often by burning at the stake—to instil fear and enforce conformity. By wielding such harsh punishments, the Inquisition created a climate of terror that

strongly discouraged any dissent against the Catholic Church or the monarchy. Thousands were tortured, imprisoned, or executed as a result of its rigorous investigations.

Torquemada condemned more than 12,000 individuals and oversaw the execution of over 2,000 people, primarily by burning at the stake. The Inquisition also severely punished those suspected of having beliefs contrary to Catholic teachings, including Jews and Muslims who had converted to Catholicism but were suspected of secretly practising their former religions. Cardinal Ximénez de Cisneros, who became Grand Inquisitor in 1507, intensified the Inquisition's efforts, leading to the execution of more than 2,500 individuals. Driven by the fervency in maintaining Catholic purity, his actions were brutal and far-reaching. Initially, the Spanish Inquisition focused on these new converts, but it later expanded its scope to include Protestant Christians in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, who were also seen as threats to the Catholic Church's dominance.

The Spanish Inquisition severely stifled the spread of Protestantism in Spain. The fear it generated led to the suppression of Protestant writings and beliefs, forcing Protestant Christians to go into hiding. The Inquisition's network of informers, combined with its reputation for brutal punishments, created an atmosphere of fear and paranoia. Protestant Christians faced overwhelming adversity, as even the slightest suspicion of anti-Catholic beliefs could result in being reported to the Inquisition. Many Protestants either fled the country, practised their faith in secret, or were executed for their Protestant beliefs.

The Spanish Inquisition began to lose its influence in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, primarily due to shifting political and social dynamics and the rise of Enlightenment thinking. By the time Queen Isabella II officially abolished it in 1834, it had already experienced a significant decline in both power and scope.

### THE ROMAN INQUISITION (1542-1859)

The Roman Inquisition, officially established by Pope Paul III in 1542, marked a significant turning point in the Counter-Reformation. Pope Paul III, a key figure in the Church's efforts to combat the Protestant Reformation, is known for his critical role in the founding of the Jesuits, and for convening the Council of Trent in 1545. The Council of Trent aimed to reaffirm Catholic doctrine and address corruption within the Church. Pope Paul III's pontification represented a crucial event in the Catholic Church's battle to stem the tide of Protestantism. In response to growing threats from Protestantism, Pope Paul III—under the advice of Cardinal Caraffa (later Pope Paul IV)—established the Roman Inquisition to strengthen Catholic dominance in Italy and other parts of Catholic Europe.

Although influenced by the Spanish Inquisition in terms of structure and procedures, the Roman Inquisition was unique in that it operated under the direct control of the papacy, rather than the monarchy. The Roman Inquisition was a central tool for the Catholic Church to root out Protestantism and dissent. Inquisitorial activities operated primarily within the Papal States and other Italian territories extended across Catholic

Europe. Local tribunals were set up across these territories to investigate suspected heresy, focusing primarily on combating Protestant beliefs and maintaining strict adherence to the Catholic Church.

The methods of the Roman Inquisition were partially modelled after the Spanish Inquisition, which set a precedent for an organised, systematic approach to dealing with opposition against Roman Catholicism. While the Spanish Inquisition was notorious for its cruel public punishments and executions, the Roman Inquisition typically employed torture and imprisonment behind closed doors. Nevertheless, this approach did not diminish its effectiveness in instilling fear and demonstrating Catholic authority through intimidation. The Roman Inquisition's trials were often conducted in secrecy, with the Inquisitors having full control. The accused were typically presumed guilty until proven innocent. Accusers simply had to identify individuals, who would then be tried by the Inquisition. In most cases, the accused were not allowed to face their accusers. It was nearly impossible for the accused to defend themselves without the opportunity to confront those who reported them. Accused individuals could also be made to testify against themselves by being compelled to confess or provide evidence that would lead to their own conviction. This could be done through intense interrogation or, in many cases, torture. Those accused were frequently left with little recourse to defend themselves. The mere threat of being reported to the Inquisition was enough to drive fear into entire communities, particularly Protestant Christians living in hiding. Like its Spanish counterpart,

the Roman Inquisition wielded enormous power to imprison, confiscate property, punish and execute those found guilty of going against Catholicism. The threat of having one's property seized or being publicly branded as a heretic also served as deterrents to believing and following Protestant teachings. This led to a climate of suspicion, where anyone—especially Protestant Christians—risked being targeted by the Inquisition, making open practice of Protestantism nearly impossible in Italy.

After Pope Paul III, Pope Paul IV's papacy (1555–1559) marked one of the most rigorous periods of the Roman Inquisition. He made the Inquisition and the Index of Prohibited Books even more powerful tools for maintaining Catholic purity and suppressing Protestant ideas. Under his guidance, the Inquisition targeted not only Protestant Christians but also those within the Catholic Church who were seen as doctrinally impure. As a result, the Roman Inquisition became one of the most influential forces in Catholic Europe, particularly during the peak of the Counter-Reformation.

Over time, the Roman Inquisition formally lost its power as a tribunal of judgment in 1908 but continued as an administrative body. Later, it evolved into the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1965, which still oversees matters of Catholic doctrine today. This legacy of the Roman Inquisition serves as a reminder of the Catholic Church's efforts to ensure its dominance through the use of violence.

## **WEAPON OF CENSORSHIP – THE INDEX**

The Index of Prohibited Books, also

called the Index Librorum Prohibitorum, became one of the Catholic Church's most essential tools to regulate the flow of information and halt the spread of Protestantism. Long before the creation of the Index, the Church had already banned works by early reformers like John Wycliffe and Jan Hus, whose writings were burned for challenging the Church's authority. However, the Index signalled a significant shift from isolated actions to a coordinated policy. It specifically identified and condemned books and authors for various reasons, particularly for promoting teachings that contradicted the doctrines of the Catholic Church.

The introduction of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in the 1440s had revolutionised the spread of ideas, allowing books to be printed and distributed faster than ever before. Martin Luther began publishing his works in the early 1500s. Between 1517 and 1522, Luther published numerous works that attacked the Catholic Church's practices. As the Protestant Reformation gained momentum, the printing press allowed other reformers like Huldrych Zwingli and John Calvin to widely circulate their criticisms of Catholicism. In addition to the male reformers, women like Argula von Grumbach, Katharina Zell, and Marie Dentière also challenged the Church, publishing works that critiqued Catholic doctrine and advocated for the Reformation.

The Catholic Church realised it needed a more organised approach to control written material. The Council of Trent (1545–1563) responded by formalising the Index of Prohibited Books, officially

approved by the Pope Pius IV in 1564. This Index targeted not only Protestant reformers but also anyone whose writings undermined the teachings and authority of the Church. The Council of Trent, which convened over the course of 18 years, addressed these challenges to Catholicism. By the final sessions, the Council had drafted the Index of Prohibited Books, aimed at halting the spread of Protestant teachings. The Index provided a structured framework for banning books, making it far more comprehensive and systematic than earlier efforts at censorship.

The 1564 Index introduced a set of guidelines that defined which books and authors were prohibited and the reasons for doing so. Its introduction laid out 10 key points which are summarized below:

1. Pre-existing bans: Books condemned before 1515 remained banned.
2. Books by Heretical Leaders: Works by Luther, Zwingli, and others were absolutely forbidden. Non-religious books by identified heretics could not be permitted unless approved by Catholic theologians.
3. Translations: Only approved translations of ecclesiastical writers were allowed. Translations of the Old Testament could be allowed under certain circumstances, while New Testament translations by authors identified by the Catholic Church as heretical were banned.
4. Vernacular Bibles: Bibles in the vernacular (commonly used languages) were prohibited. Only individuals with written permission from bishops could read them. Unauthorised readers faced severe penalties.
5. Reference Books: Lexicons and concordances were allowed if they were free from content perceived to be heretical and approved by bishops or inquisitors.
6. Controversial Works: Books on the disputes between Catholics and Protestants were restricted, following the same rules as vernacular Bibles.
7. Moral and Religious Books: Devotional books on spiritual life and confession in the vernacular were allowed, only if they contained Catholic doctrines.
8. Printing Approval: Books had to be examined and approved by church authorities before printing.
9. Manuscripts: Manuscripts needed approval before circulation, and those distributing unapproved manuscripts faced penalties.
10. Inspections and Controls: Printing houses and libraries were regularly inspected to ensure that no prohibited books were printed or sold.

The mission of the Index of Prohibited Books is clear: to prevent the spread of Protestant doctrines and to maintain undisturbed influence over emerging Protestant beliefs. The Index listed books that were deemed to undermine the Catholic Church's authority, whether they were religious or secular.

Over the centuries, the Index grew to encompass a wide range of works, including theological treatises, philosophical works and scientific texts. Between 1559 and 1948, there were 32 editions of the Index, with each new edition adding or removing titles based on the Catholic Church's evolving concerns. The banned books were typically classified according to the severity of their perceived offences,

ranging from content deemed heretical to ideas that questioned the Catholic Church's teachings. Some editions even grouped entire authors' works under a blanket ban, such as those by Luther, Calvin, and other prominent reformers.

The Special Congregation of the Index, formed in 1571, was responsible for updating the list and ensuring its enforcement. The Catholic Church used a range of enforcement tactics, from book burnings to censorship and harsh penalties for anyone found distributing or possessing banned materials. Printers and booksellers had to comply with strict guidelines, and violators faced steep fines, imprisonment, or even excommunication in severe cases.

Here are several high-profile authors who were included in the Index due to their Protestant influence:

- Martin Luther: His works, including the Ninety-Five Theses and *On the Freedom of a Christian*, were banned for their direct challenge to Church authority.
- John Calvin: His *Institutes of the Christian Religion* was prohibited for its systematic critique of Catholic teachings.
- Desiderius Erasmus: Although a Catholic, his *Praise of Folly* was banned for its satirical critique of Church practices.
- Cornelius Jansen: His work, *Augustinus* (1640), was banned for presenting a strict interpretation of St. Augustine's teachings on grace and predestination. The Church condemned it for its perceived similarities to Calvinism.
- Antonio Rosmini: His work, *The Five Wounds of the Holy Church* (1848), was

banned for its critique of the Catholic Church in Italy and its call for reforms.

While the Index was effective in curbing the spread of Protestant ideas within Catholic Europe, it also led to resistance. Protestants worked to smuggle and disseminate banned books in territories beyond the reach of the Catholic Church. In countries with strong Protestant movements, printing presses outside Catholic control were instrumental in countering the influence of the Index.

The Index of Prohibited Books remained in effect until 1966, when it was officially abolished. However, even after its formal end, Catholics today are still expected to abide by its precepts and avoid works that conflict with doctrines of the Catholic Church. The Index's long history is a reminder of the Catholic Church's efforts to censor information to maintain control over religious dominance in response to the Protestant Reformation.

## FIGHT OF THE PROTESTANT CHRISTIANS

Despite the harsh persecution faced by Protestant Christians during the Inquisitions and the restrictions imposed by the Index of Prohibited Books, the Protestants fought back. The Spanish and Roman Inquisitions sought to eradicate Protestant beliefs, particularly in Spain and Italy. However, while Protestantism was suppressed in these regions, Protestantism was preserved and spread in other parts of Europe, including Germany, the Netherlands, England, and Scandinavia. The Protestant Reformation continued to grow, especially in Northern Europe, where many reformers escaped persecution. The fact that Protestantism

survived and expanded across Europe, even as Catholic authorities sought to root it out, is a testament to God's power to preserve His truth.

The Index sought to control the dissemination of Protestant literature. However, printing presses outside Catholic control—especially Protestant regions—became crucial in ensuring that banned works could still be printed, distributed, and read. Protestant reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others published their works in places where the Index's reach was limited. By printing and smuggling books, including vernacular Bibles and works of Reformation theology, Protestant ideas were able to spread across Europe and even into Catholic territories. This was made possible by the courageous efforts to smuggle banned books into Catholic-dominated areas, particularly the works of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Protestant translations of the Bible. People in Catholic territories could then access the Scriptures and Protestant teachings. Protestant literature was circulated covertly

through networks of secret readers and underground printers. These efforts allowed Protestant doctrines to survive.

While the Inquisition and the Index were powerful tools of the Counter-Reformation, their influence waned over time. The Index was finally abolished in 1966, and the Inquisition's power as a tribunal ended in 1908. The decline and abolition of the Inquisition and Index represent an eventual victory for Protestantism.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout history, the truth of God's Word has faced opposition. Whether through persecution by the Inquisition or censorship through the Index, efforts were made to silence those who stood for biblical truth. Despite these efforts, the Reformation spread, showing that the truth of the God cannot be silenced. Christians today can take comfort in knowing that no earthly power can ultimately suppress God's Word, and we are called to boldly stand for biblical truth even in the face of extreme opposition.

# THE COUNCIL OF TRENT

## INTRODUCTION

The Council of Trent (Latin: *Concilium Tridentinum*) (1545-1563) was initiated in response to the Protestant Reformation of 1517. It can be considered the embodiment of the Catholic Reformation, also known as the Counter-Reformation (1545-1700).

The Council of Trent was the 19<sup>th</sup> ecumenical council of the Catholic Church.<sup>1</sup> Prior to the convening of this council, there were previous calls for the reform of the Catholic Church. These calls grew out of criticisms over the worldly attitude and corruption amongst the Renaissance popes and the clergy. As early as 1537, Pope Paul III had called for a council, but war and political disagreements postponed the council for eight years. The council finally began in the city of Trent (or Trento) in northern Italy in 1545. There were three periods in which the council met (1545-1547, 1551-1552, 1562-1563). Within these three periods, there was a total of 25 separate meetings or sessions.<sup>2</sup> Pope Paul III, who initiated the Council, oversaw the first eight sessions (1545-47), while the twelfth to sixteenth sessions (1551-52) were overseen by Pope Julius III and the seventeenth to twenty-

fifth sessions (1562-63) by Pope Pius IV. The number of clergymen attending the sessions was variable. When the council first began, it was attended by about 30 Catholic clergymen. The largest number of attendees was in the final sessions, where there was a total of about 250. During the second period (1551-1552), under the direction of Emperor Charles V, the council allowed Protestant clergymen to attend. However, when Protestant views were not put on the agenda nor discussed, the Protestants left in 1552.

## OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Trent Council were two-fold. First, to condemn the Protestant Reformation as well as Protestant doctrines, while affirming the doctrines of the Catholic Church. Second, to reform the Catholic Church and to address issues such as ignorance, corruption and moral decay amongst the clergy. The goals of the Council of Trent are clearly stated in its third session (1546)<sup>3</sup>:

“This sacred and holy, oecumenical, and general Synod of Trent, –lawfully assembled in the Holy Ghost, the same

<sup>1</sup> Joseph F. Kelly, *The Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: A History*, (Liturgical Press, 2009), 126-148.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/event/Council-of-Trent>

<sup>3</sup> Paul III, Julius III, Pius IV, *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred Ecumenical Council of Trent*, translated by I. Waterworth (London: Burns and Oates, 1848), 15-16.

three legates of the Apostolic See presiding therein, –considering the magnitude of the matters to be treated of, especially of those comprised under the two heads, of the extirpating of heresies, and the reforming of manners, for the sake of which chiefly it is assembled, ...”

## KEY RESOLUTIONS

The twenty-five sessions of the Council of Trent issued a number of decrees and canons; decrees being edicts that constitute doctrinal assertions and canons being rules and laws. Both decrees and canons contained anathemas against heretics, especially Protestants.

During the first period, the sessions focused upon creeds, canonical scriptures, authority of Scripture, the number of sacraments, the doctrine of original sin, the doctrine of justification, baptism, confirmation, discipline of the clergy, etc.<sup>4</sup> The second and third period’s focus was upon the Holy Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, matrimony, worship of saints, relics and images, as well indulgences, etc.<sup>5</sup>

Among the key decrees and canons issued by the Council of Trent against Protestant beliefs were:

### 1. Decree regarding the canonical scriptures and authority of scriptures (fourth session):

“But if anyone receive not, as sacred and

canonical, the said books entire with all their parts [66 Books of the Bible and 12 apocryphal books], as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church, and as they are contained in the old Latin Vulgate edition; and knowingly and deliberately contemn the traditions aforesaid; let him be anathema.”<sup>6</sup> (Emphasis added).

This decree is in opposition to the Protestant doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*, which asserts that Scripture alone (the 66 Books of the Bible) is the sole authority for Christians in faith, doctrine, and practice.

### 2. Canons regarding the doctrine of justification (sixth session):

“Canon xii. –If anyone saith that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ’s sake; or, that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified; let him be anathema.”<sup>7</sup>

“Canon xxiv. –If anyone saith that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works; but that the said works are merely the fruits and signs of Justification obtained, but not a cause of the increase thereof; let him be anathema.”<sup>8</sup>

These canons are against the Protestant doctrine of justification through faith

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<sup>4</sup> Paul III, Julius III, Pius IV, *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred Ecumenical Council of Trent*, translated by I. Waterworth (London: Burns and Oates, 1848), 12-68.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-281

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>8</sup> Paul III, Julius III, Pius IV, *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred Ecumenical Council of Trent*, translated by I. Waterworth (London: Burns and Oates, 1848), 47.

alone. They advocate justification based on an admixture of faith and works.

3. Canons regarding the sacraments in general (seventh session):

“Canon i. –If anyone saith that the sacraments of the New Law were not all instituted by Jesus Christ, our Lord; or that they are more or less than seven, to wit. Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Order, and Matrimony; or even that any one of these seven is not truly and properly a sacrament; let him be anathema.”<sup>9</sup>

“Canon iv. –If anyone saith that the sacraments of the New Law are not necessary unto salvation, but superfluous; and that, without them, or without the desire thereof, men obtain of God, through faith alone, the grace of justification; – though all (the sacraments) are not indeed necessary for every individual; let him be anathema.”<sup>10</sup>

These canons declare that there are seven sacraments instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ and that sacraments are needed for salvation. This is in contrast to the Protestant belief that there are only two sacraments, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and that they are both not necessary for salvation.

4. Canons regarding the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper (seventh, thirteenth session)

“Canon v. –If anyone saith that baptism is free, that is, not necessary unto salvation; let him be anathema.”<sup>11</sup>

“Canon ii. –If anyone saith that, in the sacred and holy sacrament of the Eucharist, the substance of the bread and wine remains conjointly with the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and denieth that wonderful and singular conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the Body, and of the whole substance of the wine into the Blood – the species only of the bread and wine remaining – which conversion indeed the Catholic Church most aptly calls Transubstantiation; let him be anathema.”<sup>12</sup>

These canons advocate the requirement of baptism for salvation and promote the doctrine of transubstantiation which believes that the elements of the bread and cup change into the actual body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. With regard to baptism, the Protestant belief is that baptism is not needed for salvation. Protestants also deem the Catholic’s belief on transubstantiation erroneous as it teaches that each time the Eucharist is observed, Christ is crucified all over again. This goes against Hebrews 7:27 which tells us that Christ’s sacrifice was but once and for all, and not repeatable. In addition, the biblical Protestant belief that the Lord’s Supper is more than symbolic; it is a means of grace toward re-consecration and

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 82.

devotion to Christ who died for the believer. Catholics, however, believe that “means of grace” refers to “means of salvation.” They believe that a person’s salvation is not complete just by believing in Christ. The person is not born again until he partakes of the Eucharist.

## OUTCOME

Pope Pius IV confirmed all the decrees of the Council of Trent. His successor, Pope Pius V, then undertook the task of implementing the decrees of the Council of Trent in 1566.<sup>13</sup> On the whole, the Council of Trent achieved most of its objectives. It brought much needed reform to the Catholic Church. The decrees and canons of the Council of Trent became

the blueprint for the Catholic Counter-reformation, reestablishing the authority of the Catholic Church through clearly defined rules. The Catholic Church managed to reclaim many of its followers in Europe. On matters of doctrine, however, it created a schism between the Catholics and Protestants. The Council of Trent defined what the Catholic Church would be for the next four hundred years. Only in 1960 were the decrees at the Council of Trent revisited. At the Vatican Council II, all the decisions made at the Council of Trent were affirmed. More than 2,400 bishops attending Vatican II, reaffirmed Roman Catholic heresies, such as papal supremacy, the mass as a re-sacrifice of Christ, auricular confession, purgatory, prayers to and for the dead, etc.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Pius-V>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.wayoflife.org/database/reaffirmsheresies.html>

# THE COUNTER-REFORMATION IN THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY

Satan will always seek to oppose the work of God. Satan hates the Word of God and the Gospel, and he will never cease to hinder the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. This opposition to God's work was also seen in the Counter-Reformation.

After so many years, has the Roman Catholic Church ("RCC") changed? Has it changed its views and position?

In January 2016<sup>1</sup>, Pope Francis led a service at Rome's Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, with the patriarch of the Orthodox Church and the archbishop of Canterbury representing the Anglican Church joining him in prayer at the start of the service. As he concluded the week-long service, he announced that he would be visiting Sweden to commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation.<sup>2</sup>

In his message during the service, he said, "As the bishop of Rome and pastor of the Catholic Church, I would like to invoke mercy and forgiveness for the non-evangelical behavior of Catholics toward

Christians of other churches."

He continued to say, "We ask most of all for forgiveness for the sin of our divisions, which are an open wound on the body of Christ,"

"At the same time, I ask all my Catholic brothers and sisters to forgive if, today or in the past, they were hurt by other Christians," he said. "We cannot erase what happened, but we do not want to allow the burden of past faults to continue to poison our relationships."

On 31<sup>st</sup> October 2016, the Lutheran Church held a joint prayer service with the RCC. While leading the service, Pope Francis and the head of the Lutheran World Federation signed a joint statement "with the commitment to continue the ecumenical journey together towards the unity that Christ prayed for."<sup>3</sup>

What are we to make of these apologies and actions? Some protestants may eagerly accept these apologies, thinking that these

<sup>1</sup> This was a different apology from the one he issued in 2015 when he visited the Waldensian Church.

<sup>2</sup> <https://theleaven.org/pope-asks-mercy-pardon-for-ways-christians-have-harmed-one-another/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/10/31/171031a.html#:~:text=While%20leading%20that%20service%2C%20Pope,Jn%2017%3A21\).](https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/10/31/171031a.html#:~:text=While%20leading%20that%20service%2C%20Pope,Jn%2017%3A21).)

are genuine expressions of the desire for reconciliation. Should we regard these as genuine actions towards reconciliation?

The question we ought to ask is, has the RCC really changed with regard to its doctrines, views and practices? These apologies and actions mean nothing if they have not changed their doctrinal stand and if they do not reverse the statements declared in the Council of Trent.

### **THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH HAS NOT CHANGED**

The RCC has not changed with regard to its doctrines and practices. The doctrines which the Reformers stood for are still opposed by the RCC today.

The RCC is still a church that does not regard the Word of God alone as the supreme authority of faith and practice. They still hold on to tradition and the authority of the Pope. In their catechism, they state: "Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture, then, are bound closely together, and communicate one with the other. For both of them, flowing out from the same divine well-spring, come together in some fashion to form one thing, and move towards the same goal." Each of them makes present and fruitful in the Church the mystery of Christ, who promised to remain with his own 'always, to the close of the age'... As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, "does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the Holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honoured with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence." The RCC, at times, would elevate tradition above the

Scriptures. For example, the RCC's practice of purgatory is not found in the Bible, but it was a tradition invented by the RCC in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. This doctrine in fact, stands in conflict to the doctrine of justification by grace alone, yet the RCC would not reject the doctrine of purgatory.

The Bible as the Word of God is the supreme authority of our faith and practice. 2 Tim 3:16-17 say, "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*"

The RCC is still a church of indulgences. The RCC states in its catechism: "An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints. An indulgence is partial or plenary according as it removes either part or all of the temporal punishment due to sin. Indulgences may be applied to the living or the dead."

The RCC still sees that there is some kind of "debt" of sin that is not paid and that has to be paid for through prayer or penance. They see indulgence as a "remission" of temporal punishment. A remission describes the forgiveness or cancellation of something. When a prisoner gets remission, he gets his prison sentence reduced because of some form of good behaviour. The Bible does not teach any form of remission of

punishment through indulgences. The Bible says that it is only through the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross that we can receive the remission of sins (Romans 3:24-25). The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ has been shed for the remission of sins (Matt 26:28). The Bible teaches us that it is by grace through faith that we are saved (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The RCC is still a church that denies the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ alone. Note that the RCC believes in the doctrine of justification by faith, they do not believe that it is by faith alone. The Council of Trent even went so far as to pronounce 125 anathemas (which curses) against Protestants. For example, on justification, Canon XII states, “If any one saith, that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ’s sake; or, that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified; let him be anathema.” The RCC today still stands by the statements of the Council of Trent. But the Bible is very clear, that justification is by Grace through faith alone. Romans 3:28 says, *“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”* Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”*

The RCC still holds on to Mary as “Co-Mediatrix” with Christ. In their catechism, they identify Mary as the “advocate, helper, benefactress and mediatrix.” But the Bible clearly says, *“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”* (1 Tim 2:5). *“But this man [Jesus], because he continueth ever, hath an*

*unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”* (Heb 7:24-25). There is only one mediator between God and man—the Lord Jesus Christ.

The RCC has not changed. As recent as 2013, Pope Francis reaffirmed the doctrines and the canons of the Council of Trent. He said that the Catholic Church “of this age revives and reflects upon the most glorious Tridentine doctrine.” Tridentine describes the doctrine that relates to the Council of Trent – the same council that pronounced curses on those who believe in the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Christ alone.

The RCC’s apology means nothing if they do not admit that the doctrines which they have taught are wrong, and the RCC has never admitted that their doctrines of salvation by works, of indulgences, of the worship of Mary, of purgatory, are wrong.

## THE COUNTER-REFORMATION IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

The RCC Church has not changed its doctrines. But they have changed their approach. Today, they use ecumenism as their approach. During a recent visit to Singapore, in September 2024, Pope Francis speaking to the youths in Singapore said, “All religions are paths to reach God. They are—to make a comparison—like different languages, different dialects, to get there. But God is God for everyone. If you start to fight saying ‘my religion is more important than yours, mine is true and yours isn’t’, where will this lead us? There is only one God, and each of us has a language to arrive at God. Some

are Sikh, some Muslim, Hindu, Christian. And they are all paths to God.” This is the language of ecumenism. The RCC in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century employs ecumenism as their new strategy in undermining the work of God in the Reformation.

The Bible tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation: Acts 4:10-12 –*“Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”*

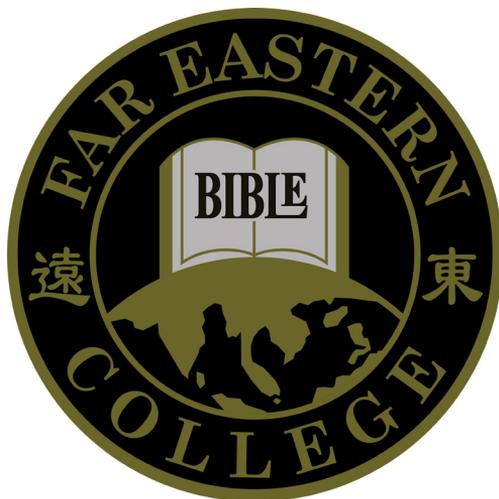
Satan may employ a new strategy, but his objectives have not changed. He still hates the Gospel and he still seeks to oppose God’s Work. The strategy that he is using today is compromise and infiltration. These 21<sup>st</sup> century ecumenical endeavours are still steps taken to counter the reformation but with a different approach. Christians today must not be deceived. In this 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we must keep the torch of Reformation alight. The RCC has not changed. They are still the same RCC that seeks to counter the Reformation.

## A 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY REFORMATION

We must continue to preach the pure Gospel of salvation in Christ alone. This is the same Gospel which the Apostle Paul preached and the same Gospel which the Reformers preached. Jude 3 says, *“Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”*

When Jude exhorts us to earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints, he is exhorting us to contend for the same faith which has been faithfully handed down to us through the generation and which is as revealed to us in God’s Word. This is the same faith which the Reformers of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century also stood for, and it must be the same faith that we continue to stand for today.

There is a much-needed 21<sup>st</sup> century Reformation. We can contend for the faith by remembering the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation and the legacy they have left behind for us. In the same spirit as the 16<sup>th</sup> century, we must preach, teach and warn against the falsehoods and false gospels preached in our time. At the same time, we must teach and preach the true Gospel with all fervency and faithfulness.



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