

## 78. THE COUNTER REFORMATION

The Reformation severely affected the Roman Catholic Church. The Papacy creaked and groaned and was challenged from all directions. In most West European countries, tens of thousands turned away from the Roman faith. God used the great reformers Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, as His instruments to lead His people out of Rome, just like He led Israel out of the Egyptian house of bondage. Rome had also become a house of bondage. Didn't Rome keep its members enslaved to the unbelief and superstition they taught, purposely withholding the truth from them?

The Reformation shook the Roman Catholic Church to its core. The leaders of the Roman Catholic Church realised that things could not continue this way. *Something* had to be done! The Roman Catholic clergy only had themselves to blame for losing the people's respect. Their wicked and sinful way of life was deeply offensive and had to change! But how?

The Roman Catholic Church stood at a crossroads: repent, join the Reformation, or resist and stubbornly hold on to their false teachings. The Reformation knocked at the door of the Roman Catholic Church, warning her to return to the truth.

Rome's response?

A clear 'no'!

Rome fought the Reformation tooth and nail. Sure, they made some superficial changes but refused to break with any of their false teachings! Persecutions recommenced and were horrible and cruel.

They killed tens of thousands of faithful believers. Only God knows how many.

In Revelation 17, the Lord shows the apostle John a woman drunk with the blood of the saints. The Roman Catholic Church, which has shed the blood of thousands of God's children, is a fulfilment of this vision.

Rome's twofold response to The Reformation is called *counter-reformation* or *anti-reformation*.

### AUTOS-DA-FE

One day, a large crowd gathers in the marketplace of a Spanish city.

The centre area is cordoned off.

Many stakes stand ready in a circle.

We shudder!

"Here they come! Here they come!"

People crane their necks.

A heavily guarded group of men, women and children slowly move towards the centre, where the stakes await. Some bow their heads; others lift their eyes to heaven. Their faces are solemn. What does all this mean?

Who are those people?

Why do the soldiers guard them so carefully?

They are condemned to death, and those stakes have been made ready for them!

Soon the flames will burn their bodies.

But why must those people die such a cruel death?

Because they read the Bible, which is strictly forbidden by the priests.

They must believe what the church teaches them.

They must return to the Roman Catholic Church.

And what if they don't want to because they *may* not?

Well, then they no longer deserve a place on this earth.

Soldiers drag them roughly from their homes: a mother who cannot be spared from her large family, a father who works hard to earn a living for his wife and children.



"...a woman, drunk with the blood of the saints. Rev 17

Rome does not care about the misery this causes to their families. Perhaps they have already been locked up for months in musty cells.

Perhaps they endured the most severe torture because their torturers tried to make them recant.

When that fails, they send the victims of the 'love' of the Roman Catholic Church on their last journey. The Spanish soldiers push their way through the crowd and arrive at the centre of the marketplace. The prisoners raise their hearts to God in a short prayer. The soldiers tell them to hurry up. Then, dignified and calmly, they climb the stakes. The soldiers tie them to the stakes. The executioner puts fire to the dry branches. Soon the flames spiral up—the wood crackles. Listen!

Out of the flames, we hear psalm-singing! But it is soon drowned out by the roaring flames. When the fires die down, the crowd goes home.

The Roman Catholic priests return to their monasteries and grin wickedly:

"Done again, another bunch of heretics cleaned up!

Get rid of all who disagree with the Roman Catholic doctrine.

Make a clean sweep!

Exterminate that brood!"

This collective burning of many 'heretics' is called auto-da-fe (lit: an act of faith: a public ritual of penance). Such autos-da-fe often took place in many Spanish cities. That is how the Spanish Inquisition raged against the Reformation.

The writings of Luther and Calvin had opened the eyes of many Spanish people to the deep decline



*An auto-da-fé of the Spanish Inquisition: the burning of heretics in a market-place.*

*Wood engraving by H.D. Linton.*

and corruption of the Roman Catholic Church.

Here too, the Spirit of God worked in the hearts of many people.

The Spanish Inquisition responded with ruthless rage.

They managed to smother the Reformation in Spain in blood.

The Counter-Reformation was successful in Spain.

### THE COUNTER-REFORMATION IN ITALY

There is an old saying: 'The closer to Rome you live, the worse Roman Catholic you are.' That saying proved to be true. In Italy, the deformation of the Roman Catholic Church was the worst. The popes set a wicked example. They only lived for wealth and pleasure but showed little interest in the spiritual well-being of the church. They lived for feasting and entertainment. Cardinals and archbishops soon followed this bad example. The ordinary people also did as they pleased, for nobody pulled them back in line. If the leaders lived in sin and wickedness, then they could too! They would just go to confession a bit more often!

Once, a Dutchman was elected as pope. His name was Adrian. He tried very hard to end that wicked and godless way of life. However, he soon had the whole papal court against him! What?

Improvements?

A modest lifestyle?

Abandon their life of

sin and wickedness?

No way!

They opposed all the

efforts of the Dutch pope to bring about change.

The only change that came to Italy was a change for the worse. As in Spain, the Inquisition grew in power and began to rage fiercely against the Reformation. That's why the Reformation could not develop deep roots in Italy either. The Counter-Reformation succeeded in Italy as well.



*Pope Adrian VI. The only Dutch pope ever. Born Adrian Florensz on March 2, 1459 in Utrecht, Portrait by Jan van Scorel, c. 1625*

## THE COUNTER-REFORMATION IN GERMANY

Charles V rules in Germany.

This emperor is *not* happy. Things are not going his way. His dream of peace and stability in his domain is dashed to pieces. Instead of peace and harmony, there is much confusion and disunity. In Germany, the Reformation had developed deep roots.

To exterminate with autos-da-fe, like in Spain and Italy? Impossible!

Not only would half the German population be killed, but the Protestant electors had become strong allies. We'll tell you more about that in the next chapter. If the emperor tries to suppress the Reformation by force, it will start a civil war.

Charles V desperately needs the armies of the Protestant electors because France and Germany are continually at war with each other. Besides, the emperor had his hands full trying to keep the Turks in check! No, Charles V doesn't want a civil war.

"But," thinks Charles V, "is there no other way of achieving peace and rest between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants?" He still hopes for reconciliation between the two. Those two must talk, who knows, perhaps they can agree.

Not that Charles V sympathised with the Protestants, on the contrary, he hated them, but he could not do without their help and support.

He decides to write the pope a letter proposing a council, a meeting where they must discuss all the wrongs and corruption in the Roman Catholic Church. He must also invite the protestants, so both parties can discuss their differences and reconcile.

This outcome is Charles' dream, and he will leave no stone unturned to achieve it.

The pope hesitates. Sure, he does not refuse Charles' request outright, that would be foolish as Charles V is a powerful monarch. He gives a placating answer: indeed, it is necessary to convene a council. It will be beneficial to discuss all the issues which are upsetting Europe. Of course, he fully agrees...  
But...nothing happens!

He continually postpones calling a council. Yes, he puts it off indefinitely. Months, years pass, but nothing happens. The emperor repeatedly urges the pope to make it happen but to no avail. The pope does not like the emperor, but he does fear him. He is worried that the proposed Council will make the emperor even more powerful than he already is. He is also worried that the emperor will influence the Council.



Charles V

The emperor wants the pope to submit to the decisions of this proposed Council. However, that is not what the pope wants! It has to be the other way around: the Council must submit to the pope! The pope will tell them what to do, and the Council must obey!

In those days, the political rulers could influence an ecclesiastical meeting through the clergy attending from their country; this shows the ongoing struggle for power between the state and church. Both pope and emperor wanted to be in charge.

Who won?

The Pope!

He gets the authority to give the final approval for any council decision they would make. He receives *absolute* power in the church. His will is now law. Clearly, this stipulation is very dangerous.

## THE COUNCIL OF TRENT

In 1545 the pope finally convened a council in Trent, a place in the north of Italy, close to Rome. Charles V would have preferred meeting in a German city, but the pope would have none of it.

That Council of Trent met off and on from 1545 to 1563. At times they did not meet for years. Sometimes they changed the meeting venue as well. What topics did they discuss?  
Too many to list them all!  
We'll mention a few.





*Council of Trent 1545-1563. Wikipedia*

They authorised a Roman Catholic Catechism and organised for this to be taught to the youth.

- They compiled a prayer book.
- They made a list of books that were banned and not to be read by church members. That list of forbidden books was called The Index or Index Librorum Prohibitorum.
- They agreed to limit the traffic in indulgences.
- They did *not* change any of the significant doctrinal differences.
- They did *not* repeal a single doctrinal error!

The church remained thoroughly Roman Catholic! The Roman Catholic Church stubbornly dug in her heels.

Charles V's dream of reconciliation between the Protestants and Roman Catholics did not become a reality. The Reformers didn't even show up at this meeting. They knew it would be a waste of time as the pope had the final say anyway. What a shame!

The Council of Trent forced a permanent separation between Roman Catholics and Protestants. The main message of the Reformation: 'Justification by faith alone' was rejected!

Even worse: The Council decided that all who believed that gospel would be cursed. They pronounced the anathema (ban) on all who were Reformed!

Both Luther and Calvin taught that the *Holy Bible* has divine authority. But Rome said the *church* has divine authority! The church, not the Bible, decides what the absolute truth is.

With this decision, Rome closed all avenues toward reconciliation and rejected God's final appeal, which came to them through the Reformation. Instead, the Roman Catholic church tyrannised millions and millions of people to stay away from the Reformation. They placed the ban on anyone who disobeyed the pope.

The Council also decided that the pope is infallible when he speaks *Ex Cathedra*; this means that when he makes an ecclesiastical statement, it has divine authority as if God has spoken through him; this gives the pope more authority than the Bible! Terrible!

Poor, poor Roman Catholic people! Pray that God may yet open their eyes!

Those decisions of the Council of Trent are still upheld today.

It remains a riddle how some so-called Protestants dare to say that their faith rests on the same basis as Rome!

## THE JESUITS

Do you know who had a lot of influence at the Council of Trent? The Jesuits.

The Jesuits? Who are they? Just listen.

Since man has become an enemy of God, he also hates his neighbour, and that hatred is the root of all wars.

Now there is a war between France and Spain again! The Spanish army withdraws. The French troops triumphantly march into Spain.

In the distance loom the towers of the fortress of Pamplona. The Captain decides to conquer this fortress in passing, thinking it will be easy. The French troops confidently storm ahead. But their fierce attacks are bravely repulsed by a handful of Spanish soldiers. They are holding out as long as



Ignatius of Loyola.  
<https://www.jesuits.global/>

possible to give the Spanish army time to withdraw to safety. Their commander is the youthful Ignatius of Loyola, a brave Spanish officer. However, they are vastly outnumbered

by the French army. When they finally conquer the fortress, they find Commander Ignatius with a shattered leg. The French know how to appreciate heroism. They do not kill Ignatius but nurse him first and then carry him to his father's castle, giving him his freedom.

Ignatius lies on his bed, maimed and disabled, unable to fight any more battles and never able to earn medals for bravery. How terrible that is for the young, ambitious Ignatius. All his beautiful dreams for the future are dashed. What can he do? He is getting awfully bored on that sick bed. He asks his brother to get him books about war heroes and brave knights to kill time. But his brother doesn't have anything like that. All he has in his library are books about the lives of the saints.

"Okay then, just give me those," he answers disappointedly. Every day Ignatius reads nothing but stories about the life of saints. These stories change his thinking. Getting honour and glory as a soldier and performing heroic deeds as a strong nobleman is no longer possible because of his injured leg. So, he decides that his life's purpose must be to perform great acts for God and His Church.

When his wounds have healed, he travels to Jerusalem to work as a missionary among the Muslims. However, his mission fails, and he must quickly flee Jerusalem. Back in Europe, at the age of thirty-three, he begins studying and joins the much younger students. They tease and ridicule him unmercifully, but he ignores them and keeps learning. First, he studies in Spain, then in Paris, where he meets Calvin. The

Spanish Inquisition thinks he is a heretic and puts him in prison. He escapes the death penalty by the skin of his teeth. Doggedly he perseveres, despite the many difficulties and setbacks. He gets some followers during those years, but not too many, as authorities watch him with distrust and suspicion. Despite the opposition, Ignatius is not discouraged. He knows what he wants and perseveres!

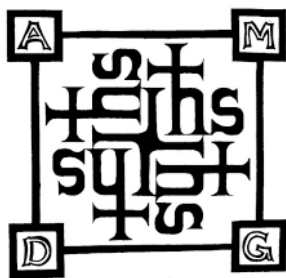
He establishes the order of the Jesuits, which means 'The order of Jesus'. In 1540 the pope recognised this order. At the head of the organisation is a general, and it is evident that Ignatius of Loyola is appointed!

The members of this order were not ordinary clergymen like the other monastic orders had but learned men who shared his vision: **'To restore the Roman Catholic Church to its former dignity and lustre.'** No matter how cruel, they would use every means at their disposal to make that vision come true. They were willing to sacrifice everything for their new idol. The Jesuits didn't even consider close relatives, friends or acquaintances of importance if the church's greatness was at stake.

They did not withdraw from the world like the monks but went out into it. Some went to Ethiopia, Japan, China, and America as missionaries, converting thousands of people to



Jesuits Order in America. Painted by Wilhelm Lamprecht



Symbol of the Jesuits

the Roman Catholic Church. They used any means to achieve their goal.

They developed friendships with emperors, kings, and rulers.

They became their

confessors.

They became tutors to princes and young noblemen.

They mixed with ordinary people as merchants and peddlers.

They demanded unconditional obedience to the Pope and Ignatius of Loyola, using force if necessary.

Were the people allowed to think and decide for themselves what was or was not right?

No way! Freedom of thinking was not allowed!

If the general (Ignatius) commanded it, the Jesuits would not have even hesitated to kill their father or mother. They were obedient to the absolute authority of the Jesuit rulers. Those within this Jesuit order who challenged that authority were either expelled or killed!

They were crafty and hypocritical!

They sacrificed everything for the earthly power and greatness of the Roman Catholic Church.

That's how the order of Jesuits operated.

Many Jesuits became leaders of the Counter-Reformation.

They had significant influence at the Council of Trent, about which we told you at the beginning of this chapter.

Their influence swayed the Council of Trent to make the decisions that caused the irreparable breach between Rome and the Reformation. The order of the Jesuits grew and spread rapidly throughout the countries of Southern Europe. They suppressed the Reformation with their ruthless methods, and the Counter-Reformation succeeded.

In the countries of Northern Europe, such as Germany, France, England, and the Netherlands, they waged bloody religious wars which claimed hundreds of thousands of victims. The Jesuits did not care about the agony and streams of blood.

Those fanatics did their gruesome work without showing any mercy or compassion.

This became a life-and-death struggle. If the Lord Himself had not upheld His church, she would have perished in a sea of misery and blood. The prophecy: '*I shall put enmity*,' was fulfilled here in the most terrible way. I'll tell you more about this in the next chapter.

## QUESTIONS

1. What choices did the Roman Catholic Church have when it found that many were leaving the church?
2. What choice did Rome make?
3. What was the Counter-Reformation?
4. What was the auto-da-fe?
5. Explain how the Counter-Reformation operated in the following countries: a. Spain b. Italy c. Germany.
6. Why did the Council of Trent meet? Why did the Reformers refuse to go?
7. List the results of this Council.
8. What power did the pope get in the church?
9. Explain the statement, 'The pope is infallible when he speaks *Ex Cathedra*'.
10. What was the Index Librorum Prohibitorum?
11. List two improvements made in the practices of the Church.
12. Identify Ignatius of Loyola.
13. Who are the Jesuits? What is their goal?
14. How did the Jesuits attempt to achieve their goals?
15. What did they demand from their hearers?
16. How did they influence the Council of Trent?

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. What were some of the differences between the Jesuit and other monastic orders?
2. Why is the church's error regarding the pope's infallibility so serious?

## REVISION

1. The .....desired to restore the lustre of the Roman Catholic Church. They demanded unconditional obedience.

2. The.....opposed Calvin's work in Geneva because they desired to keep their freedom to sin.
3. ....charged Calvin for a second time regarding his duty to take up the leadership in Geneva.
4. The attempt of Rome to break the power of the Reformation is called the.....
5. Mass burnings of Protestants in Spain were called.....
6. Calvin spent three peaceful years as pastor of the church in.....
7. Calvin married a..... named Idelette Van Buren.
8. ....was condemned to death by fire by the Council of Geneva because of his heretical views.
9. ....was rector of the University in Geneva.
10. ...., one of the students in Geneva, later became one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism.
11. ....desired to reconcile differences between Protestants and Catholics by having a council in Germany.
12. A Dutch pope.....tried to reform the life of the clergy.
13. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the pope is infallible whenever he speaks ....
14. The.....is a list of books forbidden by the Catholic Church.
15. ....was the leader of the Jesuits.
16. Cardinal.....wrote an alluring letter to the Genevans.
17. ...., the Reformer of Scotland, was educated in Geneva.
18. The.....further separated Catholics and Protestants and was the last attempt to reconcile these two.
19. The governor of the Jesuit order was called .....
20. The kings of France and Spain did not unite to attack Geneva because of their mutual.....

## RESEARCH TOPICS:

1. Write a biography on the life of Olevianus, one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism.
2. Write an account of the trial of Michael Servetus. This will necessitate research into his errors. Suggestion: Write the report as a court journalist would, listing comments made on both sides of the issue.

### **President John Adams view on the Jesuites in America.**

*"I do not like the appearance of Jesuits. If ever there was a body of men who merited eternal damnation on earth and in hell, it is the society of Ignatius Loyola.*

*John Adams, 2<sup>nd</sup> president of the US (1735-1826)*

