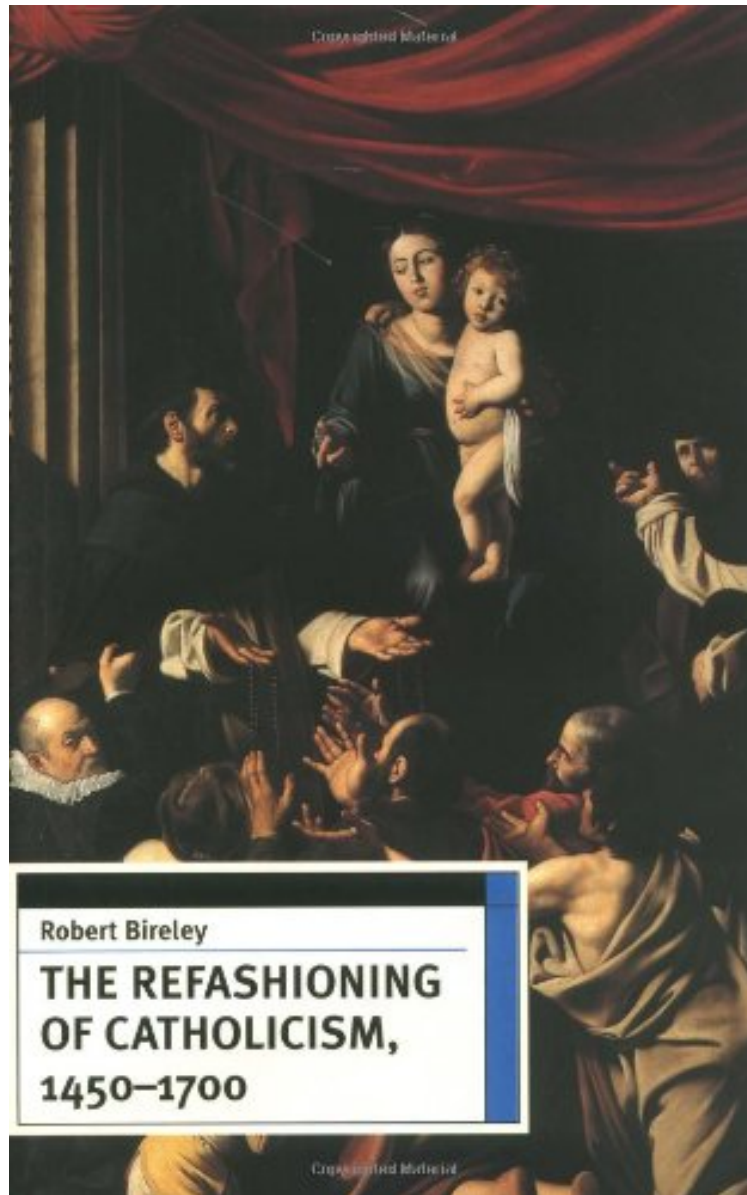


The Refashioning of Catholicism, 1450-1700: A Reassessment of the Counter Reformation

Robert Bireley

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Robert Bireley : The Refashioning of Catholicism, 1450-1700: A Reassessment of the Counter Reformation before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Refashioning of Catholicism, 1450-1700: A Reassessment of the Counter Reformation:

62 of 63 people found the following review helpful. More Life Than Previously Believed By Thomas J. Burns This is an interesting introduction to an era that traditionally bears the name "Counter Reformation." Bireley, a Jesuit Professor of History at Loyola University of Chicago, argues persuasively in his opening remarks that the term "Counter Reformation" has outlived its usefulness in the study of Catholic history. In fact, he observes, nearly all of what we would call today post-Tridentine reform not only has roots in the fifteenth century but in many cases was in full bloom and inspired the council to do what it did. Trent, in his view of things, was the institutional crest of a wave that had been building for a century. Moreover, Bireley's global view-geographic, political, scientific, theological-invites the reader to view the Church against the backdrop of forces it could not control and critique the many accommodations made by the Church to the world of the seventeenth century. Why 1450? One reason was geographic exploration. The exploits of DeGama and Columbus reflected a growing sense of the cosmos, later amplified by Galileo and others; a new economic world order, so to speak; and the increasing sense of nationalism and centralization of governments, later abetted by formalized "confessions" of religious doctrine and worship after Luther. Another reason for this new delineation of Catholic epochs was the Renaissance and the humanistic philosophy it nurtured, which the author maintains had significant impact upon many major Catholic leaders of the time, including Ignatius Loyola and Francis de Sales. At the other end of the chronological spectrum, Bireley designates 1700 as a marker because of the impact of Cartesian rationalism upon official Catholic thought in the bigger context of the Enlightenment itself. Without ignoring the contemporary problems of the "Catholic confession"-papal excesses, poor training of priests, etc.-Bireley is remarkably upbeat about the condition of the Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation and the Council of Trent in the sense that the need for reform was widely recognized and in many places being addressed already. Popular piety throughout Europe was strong in pockets, and the printing press, so often termed a tool of Protestant reformers, was cranking out thousands of copies of "The Imitation of Christ." The author notes that in the late fifteenth century the existing religious orders, or at least many of them, were distinguishing themselves by excellent preaching, pastoral practice, and adaptation. After 1500, however, the combined challenges of Protestant confessions, humanist demands of higher education, and missionary work, not to mention ecclesiastical reform itself, led to a veritable explosion of new religious orders. Not surprisingly, the Jesuit phenomenon is extensively chronicled. But to his credit, Bireley gives significant attention to Francis de Sales and the Salesian efforts to address the spiritual needs of the new humanized Catholic. Joined with the efforts of the new Capuchins, Ursulines, Oratorians, Hospitalers, Theatines, Oratorians, Visitandines, Piarists, Barnabites, Sulpicians, and the Christian Brothers, to cite several, these movements addressed the above cited needs in ways that have sculpted the Catholic experience to the present day. It is probably obvious that none of the above named orders is, strictly speaking, contemplative. Bireley contends that the paradigmatic shift in Catholic thinking in this era was toward the world, not away from it. Educators, confessors, and spiritual directors and writers consciously or subconsciously picked up the gauntlet set down by Machiavelli, whose thesis broadly read argues that the marketplace is the arena of practicality, not faith. It is no accident that the curriculum of Catholic schools at every level broadened to include the best of classical thought, that Aquinas and the idea of synthesis came back into style, and the Jesuits added drama and the fine arts to their standard *cursus studiorum*. Theologically speaking, it was an age of "doing." Loyola himself did not impose choir upon his men to free them for mission. The case study or manualist method of moral theology was born. Certainly no collective group was doing more than the missionaries. The work of the Church in the new worlds is complex and not without controversy on many levels. Bireley is somewhat limited by this complexity in his attempt to give an overview of the missionary situation, but in general no one can deny that it was not large scale and heroic. The argument is often made that Catholic missionary efforts were part of a larger colonization effort. Bireley implies in his overview that this accusation is probably more appropriate to those missionaries whose monarchs exercised state control of the Church in their kingdoms, such as Spain and Portugal. By contrast, missionaries working more directly with the papacy and the newly formed Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, such as the Jesuits in the East, worked with remarkably less baggage, the Malabar Rites Controversy notwithstanding. Although only two hundred pages, this is a thought provoking work that on the whole depicts a Roman Catholicism of considerably more vigor and spirituality than is generally attributed to the Reformation era. Certainly the author's thoughts on the importance of the new religious orders, humanism, and ecclesiastical globalization call for further reading and reflection. Curiously, this work, published by The Catholic University of America, was printed in China. One way or another, Francis Xavier was going to get there. It was only a matter of time.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. well written, brief but not superficial By jmartin Even high school students should have heard and read about the [Protestant] Reformation, a little bit about Luther, Calvin, Henry8 etc., but in my experience almost zilch about the Catholic Reformation, or Counter-Reformation, emphasizing the reactive portion of the period, or Early Modern Catholicism, Bireley's favored term, because it underscores that the Catholic reform was not just about containing Protestantism, but also about missionary efforts to evangelize the newly discovered Americas, and the new religious orders devoted to the poor, the sick, and the education of children. Bireley's book focuses on the Council of Trent, which occurred from 1545-1563, with many inactive years in between. Certainly the main object of the Council was to theologically distinguish traditional Catholic Christian teaching and practice

compared to the Reformation. But on many issues, the Council fathers conceded that the Reformers' critique was completely on target, that some of the Church, especially in the hierarchy of Rome, were engaging in decadent practices, such as clerical unchastity, warrior-popes, and the selling of indulgences, which are sacramentals, rather than the 7 sacraments, but all forbidden to be sold (simony) but donations would be accepted. However, more of the Council reasserted traditional teaching and practice, explicitly defending the content of immemorial doctrine, but this time with better, more up to date argumentation. Perhaps the most far-reaching concrete (in both senses of the term) result of the Counter Reformation was the seminary, the sequestered institution where would-be priests were, again in both senses of the term, indoctrinated, to more effectively teach the Faith, as opposed to the slipshod previous regime of apprenticeship. Many of the practices and teachings of the Reformation were returned to Catholicism during the Vatican II council in the 1960's, especially those based directly on the Scriptures' description of the earliest years of the Church. Thus, the Catholic Church conceded many points raised by the Reformers, while lamenting that they had frozen into separate denominations, rather than an intra-family scum. On p. 68 Bireley notes that the Roman Inquisition executed approx. 100 people in 200 years, and that is 100 too many, but negligible compared to the millions killed by atheist regimes in the 20th century. The Catholic heretical movement called Jansenism tried to out-purify Calvinism, but instead called forth the so-called enlightenment, which is the foundation for today's secularism, which all Christian denominations have to struggle against. Overall, I heartily recommend "The Refashioning of Catholicism, 1450-1700." 2 of 29 people found the following review helpful. heavy going By T. France Actually, I cannot bear to read it. I would like all scholarly books to be witty in the best sense of the word, or "Chestertonian" if you prefer. The Refashioning of Catholicism, 1450-1700: A Reassessment of the Counter Reformation I was attracted by the fine English Catholic name independently from the obvious high quality of the scholarship.

Throughout its history, Christianity has adapted to contemporary society and culture in order to reach people effectively and have an impact on the world. This process often evokes controversy. Certainly this is the case in the current century, and so it was in the sixteenth. Robert Bireley argues that early modern Catholicism, the period known more traditionally as the Counter Reformation, was both shaped by and an active response to the profound changes of the sixteenth century: the growth of the state; economic expansion and social dislocation; European colonialism across the seas; the Renaissance; and, of course, the Protestant Reformation. Bireley finds that there were two fundamental, contrasting desires that helped shape early modern Catholicism: the desire especially of a lay elite to lead a full Christian life in the world and the widespread desire for order and discipline after the upheavals of the long sixteenth century. He devotes particular attention to new methods of evangelization in the Old World and the New, education at the elementary, secondary, and university levels, the new active religious orders of women as well as men, and the effort to create a spirituality for the Christian living in the world. This book will be of great value to all those studying the political, social, religious, and cultural history of the period. ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Robert Bireley, S.J., is professor of history at Loyola University Chicago. He is the author of three books including *The Counter-Reformation Prince: Antimachiavellianism or Catholic Statecraft in Early Modern Europe* and *Politics and Religion in the Age of the Counterreformation: Emperor Ferdinand II, William Lamormaini, S.J., and the Formation of Imperial Policy* as well as a number of articles on early modern European History. PRAISE FOR THE BOOK: "Bireley has produced a fine new survey of the history of Catholicism in the early modern period. He targets his reassessment of the "Counter Reformation" at advanced undergraduates and the general public. He has served them well. . . . This book should be considered required reading for all those who teach about the early modern world at any level, whether from a historical, theological, or cultural perspective. . . ." *Theological Studies* "This book is an excellent introduction to the topic. It is thorough, yet concise and written clearly. It would be appropriate for use as a text for colleges or seminaries and could easily be appropriated and appreciated by adult study groups or adults interested in knowing more about how their faith has been fashioned by the society in which it has lived, and how, in turn, their faith has fashioned society. Highly recommended." *Catholic Library World* "The learned Jesuit author of this concise textbook is well known for his studies, in English and German, on the relations of Catholic counsellors, especially members of the Society of Jesus, and statesmen of early modern Europe, and on Catholic statecraft at that time more generally. . . . Bireley argues for a period of Catholic renewal which, for all its special intensity, was not in any sense a mere reaction to or product of the Protestant challenge. There is stress here on institutional change, involving popes, bishops, and clergy, on new forms of spirituality, both in more traditional regular communities and in innovative groups pursuing a more active form of religious commitment, and on advances in Catholic education, for laity as well as clergy, females as well as males." *Catholic Historical Review*

'In summary, this book transcends linguistic and cultural boundaries to synthesise extremely well the best of recent writing on the history of modern Catholicism (the bibliography provides the proof of this).' - Marc Venard, *Revue d'Histoire de l'Eglise de France* 'The emphasis throughout on the centrality of the lay piety is an excellent corrective to versions of confessionalization theory which remain too institutionally concerned with the state's direction of its subjects. Instead both casuistry and Jansenism are admirably approached with a proper Jesuit sensitivity.' - A.D.

Wright, Catholic Historical In summary, this book transcends linguistic and cultural boundaries to synthesise extremely well the best of recent writing on the history of modern Catholicism (the bibliography provides the proof of this).' - Marc Venard, Revue d'Histoire de l'Eglise de France 'The emphasis throughout on the centrality of the lay piety is an excellent corrective to versions of confessionalization theory which remain too institutionally concerned with the state's direction of its subjects. Instead both casuistry and Jansenism are admirably approached with a proper Jesuit sensitivity.' - A.D. Wright, Catholic Historical About the Author ROBERT BIRELEY is Professor of History at Loyola University, Chicago.