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Robert Bireley

THE REFASHIONING OF CATHOLICISM, 1450–1700



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THE REFASHIONING OF CATHOLICISM, 1450–1700

A REASSESSMENT OF THE COUNTER
REFORMATION

ROBERT BIRELEY

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PREFACE

In this book I have attempted a synthetic treatment of early modern Catholicism, that is, Catholicism from roughly 1450 to 1700. My reassessment aims to show how over this period Catholicism actively refashioned itself in response to the profound changes of the long sixteenth century and how it was in turn reshaped by these changes. So I find in the Catholicism of the period another instance of Christianity's continual and necessary accommodation to contemporary society and culture. My book proposes that the best way for us to understand early modern Catholicism is precisely in terms of this response to the changing world of which it was part. In our own day Christianity is undergoing a more profound reshaping.

I have written this book as an introduction to early modern Catholicism for advanced undergraduates and the general public, and as an attempt at a new interpretation for colleagues and scholars that takes into account recent scholarship and that goes beyond the usual terms 'Catholic Reform' and 'Counter Reformation'. Brevity has been in order, and I have necessarily been selective in the material that I have treated. Lack of space, and competence, has compelled me to pass over in large measure some areas of which the reader might legitimately have expected a more complete discussion, for example, English Catholicism, the French Religious Wars, and the arts. Yet I trust to have achieved a scope broad enough for a genuine synthesis. Because of their interest as well as their importance, personalities play a major part in the narrative. Given the choice of annotating extensively or expanding the text, I have opted for the latter. A Select Bibliography at the end will, I hope, at least partially compensate for the lack of notes.

I owe a debt of gratitude to many folks who have assisted me in the preparation of this book, but to three in particular. John W. O'Malley, SJ, of the Weston School of Theology in Cambridge, Massachusetts, carefully read the whole manuscript and furnished me with invaluable assistance.

My graduate research assistant in the spring of 1998, Elisabeth Fraterigo, also read the complete manuscript and with her keen journalistic eye much improved the writing. Susan Schroeder, Professor of Latin American History at Loyola University, who carefully read Chapter 7, saved me from many errors and helped with the style. I am also grateful to the anonymous reader for Macmillan for his helpful suggestions. Many years ago I learned from two of my mentors, Professor Francis Paul Prucha, SJ, of Marquette University, and Professor Dieter Albrecht of the University of Regensburg, that there is no such thing as a perfect book. The shortcomings of this one are my responsibility.

The Jesuit Community at Loyola University has provided me with moral and financial support, and for this I am grateful, especially to the then Rector, Father Lawrence Reuter, SJ. The director of the Inter-library Loan at Loyola's Cudahy Library, Lorna Newman, and her staff have with their usual remarkable efficiency obtained many books for my use. Jeremy Black, editor of the series 'European History in Perspective', invited me to undertake this book. Jonathan Reeve, the History Commissioning Editor at Macmillan, has been most helpful. They both merit my gratitude.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout its history Christianity has accommodated and adapted to contemporary culture and society in order to reach people effectively and to have an impact on its world. In this sense it has undergone periodic refashioning. Surely, this is the case in the twentieth century which outstrips previous eras in the pace and depth of cultural and social change and in the degree of challenge to the church. It was precisely this refashioning to which the charismatic Pope John XXIII summoned Catholics when he convoked the Second Vatican Council in 1962. For this process he employed the term '*aggiornamento*' or updating. But over the centuries the nature and degree of accommodation has frequently generated dispute and division within the church. One present-day example is the reaction of Catholics to the changing role of women, arguably the most profound social change of the twentieth century.

Yet the call to change, and conflict over its nature, has characterized the church from early New Testament times when what was initially a Jewish sect began to welcome Gentiles into its community, without requiring them to submit to the Jewish Law. Indeed the Acts of the Apostles and several letters of Paul deal at length with the struggle over this movement towards a universal church. Subsequently, and in particular after the Edict of Milan in 313, Christianity faced the issue of its relationship to the surrounding pagan Graeco-Roman culture. How was Jerusalem to relate to Athens? During the early Middle Ages the church confronted the barbarian invaders from the north. Much of early medieval history is the story of assimilation by the church and the Christian transformation of features of barbarian society, for example, of the mounted warrior into the 'Christian knight'. The expansion of

Europe into Asia and America in the sixteenth century required that the church adapt to both advanced and primitive societies as it sought to make known the message of the Gospel in the lands across the seas; indeed, this is part of the story of this book.

Early modern Catholicism, this book argues, was essentially the response of the Catholic Church to the changing world of the long sixteenth century, that is, from 1450 to 1650. Precisely this is what a new look at the church of the traditional Counter Reformation period reveals. The church's response or its refashioning was both active and passive in character. Just as the church reshaped itself in light of the evolving culture and society, so did this changing culture and society help refashion the church. Catholics were both agents and subjects of change. To use the terms '*aggiornamento*' or 'updating', or even the concept, for the active part of this process is anachronistic. Both Catholics and Protestants normally thought of reform and renewal rather as a return to the spirit of the Gospel and the primitive church as they understood them. Yet, in fact, they both were interpreting Christianity for the changing times. In this sense we can speak of competing attempts to renew Christianity in the sixteenth century. Hence we should expect to find reflected in early modern Catholicism, and Protestantism, sixteenth-century attitudes and values. Prominent among these were two which we will encounter recurringly throughout this book: the desire especially of lay people for a spirituality that made more Christian sense of life lived amidst worldly or secular pursuits, and increasingly in light of the upheavals of the century, the pursuit of order, religious, political, social, and intellectual.

But who made up the Catholic Church that undertook this implicit accommodation? It extended well beyond popes and bishops, to include clergy and members of religious orders, lay people, women as well as men. Charismatic figures rose up from the ranks to assume leadership, personalities such as Ignatius Loyola, Angela Merici, Francis de Sales, and Jane Frances de Chantal. Kings and princes such as Philip II of Spain and Elector Maximilian of Bavaria took active parts, often considering religion too important to be left to the clergy, to modify a statement attributed to Philip II. Lay confraternities participated actively, and as recent local studies have shown, the ordinary Catholic faithful often had a say in decision-making at the parish level. So the concept of church here is diffuse. With so many people involved, there were many views, and conflicts, over directions to be taken, and that too is a part of our story. Catholicism was hardly monolithic.

The term 'Counter Reformation' was long used to characterize Catholicism during the balance of the early modern period. But recent scholarship has tended to see 'Counter Reformation' as well as its often suggested alternatives 'Catholic Reformation' or 'Catholic Reform' as inadequate, and to search for a proper substitute which would do justice to all features of the Catholicism of the period. A recently suggested alternative is simply 'Early Modern Catholicism' because it suggests developments within the Catholic Church not only in relationship to the Protestant Reformation; as an umbrella term it places these developments more clearly in the context of the other wide-reaching changes of the sixteenth century.

The phrase 'Counter Reformation' came into general use in the nineteenth century with the assistance of the great German Protestant historian Leopold von Ranke whose *History of the Popes* began to appear in 1834. The term interpreted the movements within the Catholic Church as essentially a reaction to Protestantism, and it connoted repressive measures such as the Inquisition and the Index and suggested the political action and military force which helped instigate the religious wars. Frequently associated with this position was the judgement that the Catholic Church was progressively deteriorating throughout the Middle Ages, becoming increasingly decadent until eventually something had to happen to save Christianity. Hence the Protestant Reformation. This was a one-sided interpretation.

First effectively to employ the term 'Catholic Reformation' was another German historian, also a Protestant, Wilhelm Maurenbecher. Having travelled to Spain to undertake research into the origins of the Counter Reformation, he discovered significant reform efforts there antedating 1517 and so realized that one could not speak merely of a Counter Reformation. He entitled his volume, which appeared in 1880, *A History of the Catholic Reformation*. Important for propagating the term then was the Catholic Ludwig von Pastor, who employed it in the title of several volumes of his monumental *History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages*, which was published between 1886 and 1933. Pastor had in mind Catholic initiatives before 1517 in Italy rather than in Spain, and he also stood under the influence of his mentor, Johannes Janssen, who had painted a rosy picture of German religious and cultural life on the eve of the Reformation in his multi-volume *History of the German People since the Close of the Middle Ages*, which appeared between 1876 and 1894. Implied was that these Catholic efforts at reform would eventually have remedied the undoubted abuses within

the church without provoking the division of Western Christendom, for which the Protestants consequently stood responsible. This too was a one-sided version of events.

Certainly, there were those who took a middle position in the intervening years, but it fell to another German historian, Hubert Jedin, in an essay *Catholic Reform or Counter Reformation*, published in 1946 immediately following the Second World War, to work out a compromise that has gradually been accepted by the majority of scholars Catholic and Protestant. According to Jedin, there were indeed reform movements within the Catholic Church antedating the outbreak of the Lutheran Reformation in 1517. These he likened to streams or rivulets, which only the shock of the Protestant Reformation sufficed to merge into a river encompassing the whole Catholic Church. This happened once they were taken up by the papacy and then led to the Council of Trent, which opened at the end of 1545 and concluded only in 1563. So for Jedin the council and the renewed papacy that stood behind it were the driving forces behind both the Catholic Reform – Jedin preferred this term to ‘Catholic Reformation’ because of the special Protestant connotation ‘Reformation’ had in German, and one might add in English too – and the Counter Reformation. Neither term could be set aside. Both Catholic Reform and Counter Reformation characterized Catholicism until the end of the seventeenth century, with the Reform serving as it were as the soul of the combined movement, the Counter Reformation as the body.

Apart from its intrinsic merit, there were reasons for the widespread acceptance of Jedin’s compromise. Certainly one was the Ecumenical Movement, a movement among the Christian churches which aimed at the return to unity of all those who believed in Christ. The Reformation period had bequeathed a legacy of suspicion and hostility to Protestants and Catholics which, despite occasional ecumenical spirits, persisted well into the twentieth century. Increasing contact with non-Christian cultures, growing secularism, and outright hostility to Christianity gradually persuaded Christians of differing coloration that they needed to stand together if they were to make the Christian message heard and to have an impact on the world. Two experiences in particular stood out. One was the increasing awareness of Protestant missionaries in Asia and in Africa that divisions among Christians not only alienated the folks they were attempting to evangelize but were often unintelligible to them. So from the Edinburgh Conference of 1910 there emerged the Protestant World Council of Churches.

The Nazi experience then convinced many German Christians of their need to come together in the face of hostile and hateful forces. So a new spirit of reconciliation among Christians came to life in postwar Germany, at the time along with France the leading country for theological and historical scholarship. Historians as well as theologians participated in a new readiness to admit responsibility for shortcomings and to set aside prejudices and long-held myths. The Catholic Church formally joined the Ecumenical Movement at the Second Vatican Council.

Secondly, there was the general acceptance of the position coming out of the nineteenth century that historical scholarship ought to pursue historical truth objectively, to the extent this was possible. History ought not be partisan, sectarian, or apologetic. Many scholars have entered the field of Reformation studies, especially since the 1960s, imbued with this ideal and with no confessional axe to grind.

Yet, as John W. O'Malley has pointed out, broad acceptance of Jedin's position has not generated agreement on a single term to denote the Catholicism of the period. Such a term is important because terms imply interpretation. 'Catholic Reform' and 'Counter Reformation' remain most popular, each with its own connotation, but 'Catholic Restoration' has also been proposed. O'Malley, while recognizing the validity of both 'Catholic Reform' and 'Counter Reformation' to designate many developments within Catholicism, objects to the use of either or both to characterize the whole period, for three reasons. First, they underline the relationship to the Protestant Reformation. Yet there were many aspects of sixteenth-century Catholicism that had little if anything to do with the Reformation, such as missionary endeavours across the seas, new religious orders devoted to the service of the poor or sick or to education, and the revival of the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Secondly, 'Reform' implies that the church in the early sixteenth century was more in need of reform than at other times, a fact that has been increasingly called into question if not refuted by recent research especially regarding areas other than Germany. There certainly was no progressive decline across the church. Thirdly, in the sixteenth century the term 'reform', according to O'Malley, had a technical, canonical meaning dating from the High Middle Ages and designating the enforcement of church law in areas such as the residence, preaching, and celibacy of pastors and bishops, and other issues addressed by the Council of Trent. O'Malley contends that the early Jesuits, clearly a force within the sixteenth-century church, were not out to reform the

church in any traditional sense of the term, unless by reform one means either personal religious conversion or, more broadly, any significant change. Their goal was to christianize the faithful or to 'help souls', in the words of Ignatius Loyola. For this reason O'Malley argues for 'Early Modern Catholicism' as a comprehensive term to help capture the realities not contained in the others, essential as they are. In so doing he follows the French historian Jean Delumeau, who entitled his 1971 volume *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire*, which had as its companion a volume on the Protestant Reformation that has remained untranslated.

Both Delumeau and the English historian John Bossy, profiting from our increasing historical distance from the religious changes of the sixteenth century, represent a new comparative approach to the study of the Reformation period. They focus on the similarities between Protestant and Catholic movements and point up rather the differences between medieval and early modern forms of Christianity, whether Catholic or Protestant. Delumeau argues that rural areas in Europe – where his focus is France – remained virtually pagan until the early modern period when they were first systematically evangelized by Catholic and Protestant preachers. This evangelization, however, often effectively supported by governmental authority, comprised a large dosage of fear that has left its mark on Christianity until the present day. In addition, for Delumeau, the period of religious reform dates from the fourteenth century. Increasingly, other scholars have followed him inasmuch as they have seen both Protestant and Catholic reform movements deriving from the culture and religious yearnings of the late Middle Ages. Bossy, for his part, inclines to romanticize the Middle Ages and to see early modern Christianity's individualism and loss of a sense for symbolic expression in both Protestant and Catholic forms as a definite decline.

More important for this comparative approach is the theory of confessionalization first proposed by the German historian Ernst Walter Zeeden in 1958 and subsequently elaborated by Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling. Whereas Delumeau and Bossy concentrate more on the practice of religion, Zeeden and his followers look principally to the organization and formation of the churches or, to use the German expression, the different 'confessions'.¹ The theory of confessionalization, then, exhibits the parallels between the evolution of the confessions, and, furthermore, locates in their development a decisive step in Western modernization. Reinhard in a famous 1983 article designated

seven such parallel features in the formation of confessional identity: the elaboration of clear theological positions, such as the Lutheran *Confession of Augsburg* (1530); their promulgation and implementation through institutional forms such as synods, visitations, and nunciatures; their internalization, especially through schools and seminaries; the use of the means of communication, especially the printing press, to propagandize, and of censorship to hinder the propaganda of others; disciplinary measures, such as the visitation of parishes and excommunication; control of the nature of and access to rites; and the development of a peculiar confessional language.

Advocates of this theory also consider the establishment of the confessions to be a major factor in the growth of the modern state in that the confessions fostered unity of subjects or citizens, instilled in them a sense of discipline and of loyalty to authority, and often made it possible for the ruler to make use of church resources for his purposes. More recently, Heinz Schilling and R. Po-Chia Hsia, the foremost interpreter of this theory in the English-speaking world, have distinguished between confessionalism, that is, the formation of the confessions themselves, and confessionalization, that is, the role played by the confessions in society, and especially their part in the emergence of the state. So one can speak of the confessionalization of society or of the state. Reinhard has underlined the contribution of the confessions to the coming of the modern world through their advancement of individualism, rationalization, social discipline, bureaucracy, and, especially in the case of Catholicism, a move beyond European ethnocentrism.

Finally, the approach taken by those employing the terms confessionalism or confessionalization is to look at the development of the churches over the long haul, that is, from the late 1520s, when the first steps were taken in the formation of Protestant confessions, until the late seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries when the new confessions had solidified their structures and achieved a decisive impact on society and culture. Thus, from this perspective, the Reformation period in Germany does not end with the Peace of Augsburg and the legalization of Lutheranism in 1555, or even with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 with the further legalization of Calvinism and the fixing of confessional boundaries after the Thirty Years War. Rather it endures until the early eighteenth century, where there is no clear political or religious marker.

One flaw in the argument recently proposed by some historians that the Reformation failed is that they do not take the story far enough. The longer extension of the period corresponds to Delumeau's

chronology and breaks with the traditional German position, which ended the Counter Reformation or Catholic Reform with the Peace of Westphalia. Indeed, confessionalization theory works especially well in conceptualizing the complicated and multifarious developments in early modern Germany, divided as it was into a multiplicity of virtually independent territories. But it places a disproportionate emphasis on organization and on the social discipline of the population and fails to appreciate adequately the properly religious elements of the period.

My own approach, or reassessment, attempts to incorporate many of the above considerations as well as elements of recent social history, and it draws clearly on the insights of H. Outram Evennett in his *The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation* of 1968. It considers the emerging confessions or churches of the sixteenth century – the Lutheran, the Anglican, the Reformed or Calvinist, the Anabaptist, and the Catholic – to be competing Christian responses to the challenges posed by the changing society and culture of early modern Europe. This book is about Catholicism's refashioning as it moved into the modern era. But there will be opportunity to draw attention to comparable developments within Protestant churches as we go along. From another perspective, it asks how the Catholicism of 1700 was different from its medieval antecedent.

As to the terminological issue, my preference is for 'Early Modern Catholicism' to designate this period in Catholicism's history because as an overarching term it comprehends the fullness of Catholicism's response to the changes of the long sixteenth century. 'Catholic Reform' and 'Counter Reformation' indicate significant parts of this response but not the whole, and they associate early modern Catholicism too closely with the Protestant Reformation. In this book, however, I will make use of all three terms depending upon the context. Here early modern Catholicism spans the years from roughly 1450 to shortly past 1700 when the changes of the long sixteenth century have been assimilated. Occasionally, however, following recent scholarship, in order to pick up long-term developments, I will have to make forays further back into the Middle Ages and forward into the eighteenth century.

Altogether there were five principal changes which marked the transition from medieval to early modern times. Some were more sudden than others, some had roots deep in the Middle Ages but reached a

significant stage in the first three decades of the sixteenth century. The first was the growth of the state; that is, the consolidation and centralization of political authority over a particular geographical area, or the establishment of sovereignty, a term coined appropriately by Jean Bodin in 1576 to designate this emerging reality. To be sure, the modern state's origins reached back into the High Middle Ages and the state would continue to evolve into the nineteenth century. But the first half of the sixteenth century constituted a major phase in its growth with the three long-reigning monarchs: Francis I of France (1515–47), Henry VIII of England (1509–47), and Charles V of Spain (1516–56), who built on his inheritance from his maternal grandparents, Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, whose marriage in 1469 brought all of the Iberian Peninsula except Portugal eventually under their rule. In Italy and in Germany this consolidation led into smaller, territorial states rather than national monarchies and in Germany under the umbrella of the Holy Roman Empire. Indeed, as the century began it was not clear which would obtain the predominance of power, the territorial states or the Empire, and the Reformation itself significantly contributed to the victory of the territorial states. Characteristic of this consolidation was the gradual assumption of the principal functions of government by king, prince, or other central authority: the preservation of order and defence, the administration of justice, and the collection of taxes. This process frequently brought prince or king into conflict, first, with representative institutions, which were his rivals for the control of government and were usually dominated by the nobility, and, secondly, with the church, which was the only Western institution to have survived the barbarian invasions and had been the focal point of European unity during the High Middle Ages.

Conflict between church and government long antedated the Reformation, and secular authority was increasingly obtaining the upper hand. There were three principal areas of conflict. First there was the question of ecclesiastical appointments. Inasmuch as rulers increasingly considered themselves responsible for religion in their realms and inasmuch as major ecclesiastics often played important political roles, should not the government also have a hand in their appointment? By 1500 many governments in town as well as state had acquired the right to name pastors and preachers as well as bishops and abbots. The second area of conflict was legal jurisdiction. In case of conflict, which law was to prevail: the older, universal canon law of the church or the law of the new state? Were clerics to remain to a large degree exempt or

outside the reach of the law of the state? Closely attached to this issue, then, was the third area of conflict, taxation. On the one hand, could the papacy continue to draw money to Rome – this capacity had been greatly reduced by the fifteenth century – and could governments tax church property or the clergy, which had largely been exempt from such taxation because of its contribution to the common good? If so, under what circumstances and with whose permission?

Associated with the rise of the state was a decline among the European elite of a consciousness of a united Christendom, which had peaked in the twelfth or thirteenth century at the time of the Crusades. Since then both pope and Holy Roman Emperor had suffered in their power and in their moral authority, to a good degree because of the destructive rivalry between the two of them. Contributing to this loss as well was the long residence of the popes in Avignon (1309–77), when they were thought to be under excessive French influence, and then the Great Western Schism (1378–1417) when two and then three popes claimed the papal office. By the mid-fifteenth century popes were coming to see themselves more as rulers of an Italian state. Yet consciousness of European solidarity persisted in men such as Erasmus and Thomas More, and in Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor as well as King of Spain, who considered the defence of Europe from Moslem encroachments in Central Europe, and especially in the Mediterranean, to be one of his main responsibilities.

A second change, or perhaps congeries of changes, was social and economic. By 1490 a demographic resurgence had set in after the disaster of the Black Death (1347–50), and the sixteenth century was a period of population growth, tailing off towards the end of the century particularly in southern Europe. Rough estimates indicate that the European population swelled from 55 million in 1450 to 100 million in 1650, with, of course, vast regional variations. Growth was prominent in the cities, though the great majority of folks continued to live in rural villages. The population of Antwerp, then the commercial and financial centre of Europe, jumped from 37,000 in 1500 to 100,000 in 1560, and that of Rome grew from 55,000 in 1550 to over 100,000 by 1600. Accompanying the demographic increase was economic expansion – more goods were needed to satisfy a rising population – in agriculture, commerce, and industry, a development that was fostered by the new contacts with the lands across the sea but was due more to the growth of internal European trade. Indeed, in the sixteenth century Europe moved rapidly in the direction of a capitalist economy. One feature of

the period was the movement by 1700 of economic leadership from Italy to the northern states, the Dutch Republic, England, and France.

Economic expansion did not benefit everyone. Certainly it contributed to the relative social mobility of the sixteenth century and to the expanding urban middle class that was the principal lay carrier of both Catholic Reform and Protestant Reformation. But it was accompanied by an increasing discrepancy between rich and poor, especially in the cities. In 1526 the Spanish humanist Luis Vives, residing in Antwerp, published the first systematic treatise on poor relief, *On the Subvention of the Poor*, and throughout the century vagrancy and poverty, particularly in urban areas, attracted the concern of governments and churches. Throughout Western Europe peasants were relatively well off at the start of the sixteenth century, despite the great Peasants Revolt in Germany in 1524–5, but their lot generally declined between 1500 and 1700, and France in particular suffered a wave of peasant rebellions in the seventeenth century.

The expansion of Europe into Asia, America, and to a much lesser extent Africa, and the gradual formation of the European colonial empires, first the Portuguese and Spanish, and only after the turn of the century the nascent Dutch, English, and French, was the third major change that characterized the sixteenth century. From the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries the foundations were laid for the European domination of the world that would endure into the twentieth. The motives for this expansion can still be summarized, it seems, in the old slogan ‘God, Gold, and Glory’, though not necessarily in that order; that is, the renewed missionary impulse of Christianity; the capitalist urge for new sources of profit and wealth, which often corresponded with the mercantilist thinking of the growing states; and the desire for adventure, glory, and achievement which is associated with the Renaissance. So Europeans came into their first extensive contact with the advanced cultures of India, China, and Japan in the East and of the Aztecs and Incas in America, as well as with many primitive cultures on both sides of the world. The Portuguese rapidly established their network of fortified trading posts first along the west coast of Africa, then along the coasts of the Indian Ocean and in the East Indies; they reached China by 1512 and Japan by 1542, where they were kept at arm’s length by both, so that missionaries were compelled to enter without the benefit, or perhaps curse, of Portuguese protection. To the west the Spanish government gradually wrested control over its American territories from the conquistadores and set up its colonial

governmental structure by mid-century, with headquarters in Mexico City and Lima. These territories across the sea posed an enormous new challenge to Catholic efforts at evangelization.

The series of intellectual and cultural currents which we have come to call the Renaissance marked the fourth change from the Middle Ages to early modern times. These first took root in Italy in the fourteenth century, where Petrarch (1304–74) stands out as the first major Renaissance figure, but they did not extend beyond the Alps in a meaningful fashion until the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Over a century ago Jacob Burckhardt encapsulated the spirit of the Renaissance in the words ‘the discovery of the world and of man’, a phrase which is still valid today if properly understood, and not taken as it was by Burckhardt as a return to paganism nor as a completely new development. ‘Discovery of man’ points not to a new sense of the value of human beings, which had always characterized Christian thought at least at its best, but to a new individualism, that is, to a new self-consciousness and recognition of the unique character of the individual human personality and to its potential for achievement often in the pursuit of glory. This implied optimism about man’s possibilities for development, an attitude which was encouraged by the Florentine intellectual virtuoso Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man* in 1496. The artist was no longer the anonymous craftsman and guild member but an individual who signed his work, who imitated God the Creator in his production, and who in some cases rose to the status of celebrity, like Michelangelo, who consorted and contested with popes. Both the portrait and the self-portrait, increasingly popular in the Renaissance, sought to capture the individual and to draw attention to the individual’s inner life as Petrarch had.

As for the ‘discovery of the world’, this indicates a new appreciation of the world about us, as seen, for example, in landscape painting or interest in human anatomy, and more generally, a vibrant interest in secular topics. During the Renaissance there was an explosion of knowledge often associated with the revival of Greece and Rome and with the new contacts overseas. Mathematics, astronomy, history, geography, law, political thought, and philosophy all greatly expanded during the Renaissance. But a word of caution is necessary here. As historian Jack Hexter pointed out many years ago, interest in secular topics did not mean a turn away from religion, as if there were only so much intellectual energy and energy which was devoted to secular matters was necessarily denied to religion. Rather the result of ‘the discovery of the world

and of man' was the desire and the demand for a style of religion or a spirituality that took more account of individuality and of life in the world around us.

Humanism was the main intellectual current of the Renaissance. By this was not meant an attachment to human values as it usually does today, when nearly everyone considers himself a 'humanist'. The term had a much more specific meaning. It designated first enthusiastic and scholarly study of the ancient classics, Latin first and then Greek, which presupposed knowledge of those languages. The medievals, of course, had known the ancient authors, but the Renaissance was different in a number of ways from the so-called Carolingian Renaissance or the revival of Aristotle in the twelfth century. Many more people were involved both as professionals and amateurs. So the movement had a much larger social base both in the towns among the prospering upper middle class and at the courts; it was not a matter only of clerics, though they too took part. Many more manuscripts from the ancient world were now available, recovered by diligent searches in the monasteries where they had been preserved. More significantly, from their understanding of the ancient world and its difference from their own, humanists came to a new historical consciousness, that is, the realization that there were different eras or epochs in history, such as the ancient and the modern, which was their own, and these epochs had to be understood on their own terms. There was discontinuity in history, and it had to be acknowledged. Moreover, men of the Renaissance often assumed values of the ancient world. Humanism encouraged devotion to the common good and participation or service in government in both cities and in princely states. Florentine citizens had themselves sculpted in Roman togas. Generally, humanism contributed to the optimism about human nature that characterized much Renaissance thinking.

Humanism also designated an educational and cultural programme harkening back to the ancient world and emphasizing what we call today the humanities. It looked more to the general formation of the individual than the preparation of teachers, lawyers, and theologians as had much of medieval higher education, and it was particularly attractive to the expanding urban middle class. For its principal goals it took eloquence in speech and in writing and the formation of character, two goals which had been united in ancient rhetorical education. They prepared an elite for participation in government and in the life of the community. The curriculum emphasized grammar, logic or dialectic, and rhetoric, which were all associated with the use of language, plus

history, literature, and moral philosophy. Latin was the language employed, not the medieval Latin which humanists disdained as barbaric but the classical style especially of Cicero. For the humanists style equalled content in importance.

The Renaissance return to the ancients stimulated anew many areas of study, and it helps to explain the contemporary expansion of knowledge. The recovery of works of Plato invigorated philosophical thought. Galen's writings gave new stimulus to the study of medicine, and Renaissance legal scholars laboured to understand and to apply the ancient law of the Romans. Interest in the literature of Greece and Rome eventually led to renewed interest in the early Christian sources, the Scriptures and the early Fathers of the Church, and this generated the study of Hebrew as well as Latin and Greek. As humanism crossed the Alps it became increasingly identified with the cause of religious reform. Many humanists, led by the Prince of Humanists, Erasmus of Rotterdam, urged a return to a more biblical form of Christianity as the basis for its renewal.

The first author to live off his writings, Erasmus was able to disseminate his work effectively because of the 'media revolution' brought about by the invention of the printing press during the Renaissance. For a long time far-sighted entrepreneurs had been aware of the expanding market for reading material, especially in the towns. Johann Gutenberg, a goldsmith of Mainz, made the final technological breakthroughs that produced the printing press. About 1455 there came from his press at Mainz the first printed book, the Gutenberg Bible. The printing press's impact on the communication of religious knowledge and ideas was enormous and swift. By 1500 there functioned nearly 60 presses in Germany and perhaps as many as 150 in Italy. Luther proved himself to be a master of the new media, and both Protestants and Catholics were to exploit it effectively.

Another change associated with the Renaissance was the Scientific Revolution which stretched from the publication of Copernicus's *On the Revolution of the Heavenly Spheres* in 1543 to the appearance of Newton's *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* in 1687. This profound shift in the Western world view, from the *cosmos* of the Greeks embellished by Ptolemy and the medievals to a mechanistic vision of the universe, was crucial to the period, especially after the late sixteenth century when three competing paradigms fought for predominance, a struggle which provided the background for the Galileo Affair. The extent to which Copernicus and, more generally, the new science was indebted to

the recovery of elements of ancient science and mathematics remains controversial.

The fifth change, of course, was the Reformation. The church was the dominant institution in European life in 1500, as it had been for centuries. Its influence penetrated virtually every aspect of life. The cycle of liturgical feasts determined life's rhythm for the town-dweller as well as the peasant. Folks moved from Advent in late autumn to Christmas and the Christmas season, from Lent to Easter and the Easter season in the late winter and spring, and then through Ordinary Time back to Advent. The year was punctuated with fasts and feasts, such as the Feast of St John the Baptist on 24 June, usually marking the onset of summer. Processions and religious dramas enlivened the feasts at the same time as they instructed the people. The church met men and women at the principal points in their lives with baptism, matrimony, extreme unction, and funeral. The social as well as the religious centre of the community was the village church, and Sunday Mass was a regular weekly event. Education had once been a near-monopoly of the church from the village school to the university, but this changed in the late Middle Ages as some cities started to assume responsibility for schooling. Most early education in Italy was in the hands of municipal government or independent masters by 1300, whereas in England a close association between church and school seems to have been the rule. By the late fifteenth century both town governments and the lay social and religious brotherhoods, known as confraternities, assumed a major role in the care of the sick and poor in many urban areas of Europe.

The state of the church on the eve of the events of 1517 belies easy generalizations. Overall, recent research has tended to evaluate it more positively and to underline its vitality. The situation in Spain was different from that in Germany, the situation in England different from that in France. The papacy reached a low point in its history under Alexander VI (1492–1503). Papal moral authority and political influence had declined since the High Middle Ages. During the Great Western Schism there revived the doctrine of conciliarism; that is, that an ecumenical council representative of the whole body of the church, was superior to the pope, and it remained a threat to the papacy long after its condemnation by Pope Pius II in 1460. Rulers, especially the French kings, used the threat of a council to extract concessions from the papacy. Louis XII called a council for Pisa in 1511 in an attempt to counter Pope Julius II's policy towards France in Italy, but the pope

outmanoeuvred him. Pope Leo X, then, in the Concordat of Bologna of 1516, yielded to Francis I the predominant voice in nearly all the major ecclesiastical appointments in the realm in exchange, in part, for the king's disavowal of conciliarism. Starting with Nicholas V (1447–55), the popes concentrated increasingly on their role as rulers of an Italian state and were themselves elected from aristocratic Italian families. Like other contemporary rulers they sought to consolidate their position against turbulent nobles, and as it became more difficult to draw funds from Europe, they worked to increase revenues from the Papal States themselves. A windfall was the discovery at Tolfa in 1460 of alum, a chemical used in the production of dyes hitherto obtainable only from the Middle East. In addition, the Renaissance popes used the patronage of artists and humanists to enhance the prestige of the papacy.

In 1494 the French invaded Italy, thus setting off the Italian Wars that continued on and off until 1559 and served as a background to the Reformation. Principal protagonists were the French under the Valois kings and the Spaniards, under Habsburg rulers after 1515, who fought for control of wealthy Italy, 'the cockpit of Europe'. The principal goal of Alexander VI in this situation was to bequeath a state out of the papal dominions to his son Cesare, the hero of Machiavelli's *Prince*. His successor, Julius II (1503–12), the 'warrior pope', took the lead in attempting to drive the foreigners out of Italy, and he drew Michelangelo and Raphael to service at the Vatican. Neither he nor his successor, the first Medici pope, Leo X (1513–21), was completely closed to reform, as we shall see. Despite the words attributed to him after his election, 'Now that God has given us the papacy, let us enjoy it', Leo was a moral man and an astute patron of the arts, but hardly the religious leader to encounter the challenge of Luther. Nor was his cousin, Clement VII (1523–34), who was pope at the time of the break with Henry VIII, an improvement. His political vacillations greatly harmed the papal position in Italy, leading to the infamous Sack of Rome in 1527. Fear of a council that would criticize him and the papacy seems to have haunted him.

Certainly there were abuses among the clergy, but these were hardly the whole story. Two prominent abuses were associated with the benefice system. A benefice was an ecclesiastical office with revenues attached; some benefices carried with them pastoral responsibilities, others did not. In the case of pastors or bishops, the revenue was meant to support the benefice-holder as well as to maintain the church and perhaps a school, and to supply assistance for the poor. One abuse was