

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

Robert Bireley

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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



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