Modern European History

Unit 3 – The Protestant Reformation

The Catholic Reformation

The situation in Europe did not appear favorable for the Catholic Church. Lutheranism had become rooted in Germany and Scandinavia, and Calvinism had taken hold in Switzerland, France, the Netherlands, and Eastern Europe. In England, the split from Rome had resulted in the creation of a new national church. However, the Catholic Church was revitalized in the sixteenth century. It found new strength and regained much that it had lost to the Protestant Reformation. Three elements supported this Catholic Reformation, which is also called the Counter-Reformation. The first was the establishment of a new religious order, the Jesuits. The second was the reform of the papacy. The third element was the Council of Trent.

A Spanish nobleman, Ignatius of Loyola, founded the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits. Pope Paul III recognized Loyola's small group of followers as a religious order in 1540. All Jesuits took a special vow of absolute obedience to the pope, making them an important instrument for papal policy. Jesuits used education to spread their message and established schools. Jesuit missionaries were very successful in restoring Catholicism to parts of Germany and eastern Europe and in spreading it to other parts of the world.

Later in the century, a Spanish nun, Teresa of Ávila, promoted the reform of the Carmelite order. The Carmelites were one of the four major religious orders founded in the Middle Ages who took a vow of complete poverty. In 1562 Teresa founded a small convent at Ávila where the nuns followed a very strict way of life.

Reform of the papacy was another important element in the Catholic Reformation. The participation of Renaissance popes in dubious financial transactions and in Italy's politics and wars had encouraged corruption. It took the jolt of the Protestant Reformation to change the Catholic Church.

Pope Paul III saw the need for reform. He took the bold step of naming a Reform Commission in 1535 to determine the Church's ills. The commission blamed the Church's problems on the popes' corrupt policies.

**The Inquisition**

To stop the spread of Protestantism, the Catholic Church set up courts called the Inquisition. The Inquisition had been established in the year 1217 to find and punish heretics, or people whose beliefs differed from those of the church. However, it had not been used very much until Pope Paul III reorganized it in the year 1542. These courts used investigators, trials, prisons, and torture to discourage those who went against the Catholic Church. In addition to Protestants, many Jews and Muslims were also tried in the Inquisition courts. Those found guilty were either tortured or killed. The pope was determined to get rid of heresy no matter what it took. It is reported that he once said, "Even if my own father were a heretic, I would gather the wood to burn him."

**The Index**

To make sure that no Catholic read anything that might lead him astray, Pope Paul IV published a list of books called the Index in 1559. The Index was a list of books that no Catholic person was supposed to read. Included on the list were all of Martin Luther's works, as well as some translations of the Bible. The Index was divided into three sections. The first section listed the names of writers who were believed to be heretics. The second section listed the titles of books that went against the Catholic beliefs. The third section cited anonymous works that were not to be read. This censorship of books by the Index continued into the twentieth century.

heretic = someone who contradicts (goes against) the teachings of the church

censorship = restriction of something because it is considered wrong or inappropriate

**The Council of Trent**

The Council of Trent was set up by Pope Paul III in the year 1545 so that bishops and cardinals could review and think about all of the teachings of the Catholic Church. The council met twenty-five different times between 1545 and 1563. At first, they tried to determine if Catholics and Protestants could compromise and work things out. When they realized that it was too late to compromise, they worked to eliminate existing problems in the church and to decide once and for all where the Catholic Church stood on all the issues with which Luther and other Protestants disagreed. The final decrees of the Council reaffirmed traditional Catholic teachings in opposition to Protestant beliefs. Both faith and good works were declared necessary for salvation. The seven sacraments, the Catholic view of the Eucharist, and clerical celibacy were all upheld. Belief in purgatory and in the use of indulgences was strengthened, although the selling of indulgences was forbidden. They reaffirmed that the pope is the head of the church and that he is the only one who has the right to interpret the Bible. The Roman Catholic Church now possessed a clear body of doctrine. It was unified under the pope's supreme leadership. Catholics were now more confident as defenders of their faith.

*Since the Catholic Church, instructed by the Holy Ghost, has, following the sacred writings and the ancient tradition of the Fathers, taught in sacred councils and very recently in this ecumenical council that there is a purgatory,[1] and that the souls there detained are aided by the suffrages of the faithful and chiefly by the acceptable sacrifice of the altar, the holy council commands the bishops that they strive diligently to the end that the sound doctrine of purgatory, transmitted by the Fathers and sacred councils,[2] be believed and maintained by the faithful of Christ, and be everywhere taught and preached. The more difficult and subtle questions, however, and those that do not make for edification and from which there is for the most part no increase in piety, are to be excluded from popular instructions to uneducated people.[3] Likewise, things that are uncertain or that have the appearance of falsehood they shall not permit to be made known publicly and discussed. But those things that tend to a certain kind of curiosity or superstition, or that savor of filthy lucre, they shall prohibit as scandals and stumbling-blocks to the faithful. The bishops shall see to it that the suffrages of the living, that is, the sacrifice of the mass,[4] prayers, alms and other works of piety which they have been accustomed to perform for the faithful departed, be piously and devoutly discharged in accordance with the laws of the Church, and that whatever is due on their behalf from testamentary bequests or other ways, be discharged by the priests and ministers of the Church and others who are bound to render this service not in a perfunctory manner, but diligently and accurately.*

~ *The Council of Trent, decree*

**Reforming Orders**

Some Catholics believed that it was important to reform their church from within. These reformers began their own groups to improve the things that were wrong with the church. Some early reforming orders included the Theatines and the Franciscans, known for their strict observance of priestly duties; and the Ursulines, a group of women who dedicated themselves to the education of poor girls. The most powerful and important of these reforming orders, though, was the Society of Jesus. Its priests, known as Jesuits, were dedicated to converting unbelievers to Christianity, stopping the spread of Protestantism, and helping the poor and sick. The Society of Jesus was founded in 1534 by Ignatius of Loyola, who ran the society like an army and demanded complete obedience. The Jesuits were intelligent, zealous men who were very successful in slowing the spread of Protestantism because of their dedication to education, missionary work, and helping the poor.

Discuss the pros and cons of each of the four responses using the chart below:

Response to the Reformation Pros Cons

the Inquisition

the reforming orders

the Index

the Council of Trent

Design an invitation to invite former Catholics back to the Church. Invitations should include what has been done to change what needed changing. Persuasive language should be used. (You may use the space provided below to plan out your invitation but should create it on another sheet of paper.)