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A Catholic Reformations of Manners

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Intro

What I am (only slightly facetiously) calling the Catholic Reformation Manners refers to the movement within and among Catholics under James II that pre-dated the Protestant Reformation of Manners and was, I argue, very much in the minds of the leaders of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners. I think the critical aspects were in the areas of Tactics for urging Reform and also, as I see it, in some elements of the content.

Tactics

Catholic missionaries had inundated England during the reign of James II. The religious orders, especially, had been skilled at promoting Catholic doctrine and infiltrating English society. Their polemic, while not popular, had been widely available and laid out in an accessible manner.¹ “Frequent disputations were held with Protestants ministers,” recorded the Jesuit missionaries in England, “sometimes in private, occasionally in public, before large audiences: these always produced good results among the hearers.”² They preached and catechized and celebrated mass in public. All these missionary attempts, the Jesuits declared, resulted in “abundant fruits.”³

It was asserted by Protestant writers too, that with the now-lively competition between Protestants and Catholics, “sermons [are] delivered almost from every pulpit, the ministers redoubling their pains in emulation to the Catholic fathers . . . and we may

¹ Anthony Claydon notes such an “awakening” but sees it as spontaneously following the Revolution instead of having roots in James’s. Although he argues that many of the bishops William appointed had emphasized catechising and schools while preaching in London in the 1680s, I believe that the competition felt by the Protestants regarding the Catholics was directly responsible for many of these methods of reformation. Claydon, *Godly Reformation*, 66, 174.

² Foley, *Records of the English Province*, vol. 5, 26.

³ Foley, *Records of the English Province*, vol. 5, 152.

judge by the crowding of the churches.”⁴ Bishop Gilbert Burnet admired their method of active pastoral engagement, which led to renewed enthusiasm within their church for the faith—and along with other Anglican leaders, he called for an emulation of such efficient education and clerical practices.⁵ Robert Fleming, that tireless promoter of the Reformation of Manners, traced his emphasis on morality and effective pastoral care to the missionary efforts of the Roman Catholic under James II. ⁶ English Protestants were acutely aware of the increased activity of the Catholics and, rather than decrying it, viewed it as a model (if only in the competitive sense) for their own attempts to invigorate English religious life.

By the time of the Glorious Revolution, the need to spread truth to the people and the good benefits of this, were well established. Such a promotion of right religion led to the formation of voluntary societies, among them those for Reformation of Manners, Propagation of the Gospel, and Promotion of Christian Knowledge. It was also understood that the competition both among Protestants and between Catholics and Protestants had sped on the initiative to propagate the gospel. Daniel Burgess saw the Societies for the Reformation of Manners as Protestantism’s answer to the Jesuits. Just as the Jesuits were “found to be above all other Orders the most likely to restore and support the tottering Papacy,” he argued, Protestants should use the Societies.”⁷

⁴ *How Members of the Church of England Ought to Behave under a Catholic King* (London, 1687), 34.

⁵ Burnet, *History of My Own Time*, vol. 2, 451; vol. 3, 122; *The Catechism for the Curats* (London, 1687), 1-5; *Articles Recommended by the Archbishop of Canterbury*, in *Somers Tracts*, vol. 9, 134.

⁶ Robert Fleming, *The Present Aspect of Our Times* (London, 1694), 26.

⁷ Burgess, *Golden Snuffers*, v-vi; Tho. Doolittle to Rev. Ja. Conningham, Dec. 14, 1699, Birch MS 4275, f. 193, British Library, London; To Rev. Strype from George Lewis, 1 March 1705, Add MS 5853, f. 60 (b), British Library, London.

Voluntary societies as well as a renewal of the tradition of pastoral ministry were needed for Reformation.

Missionary societies were also needed to compete with the Catholics overseas. Regarding the East India Company and the interactions its overseas emissaries had with Catholics, Humphrey Prideaux, the dean of Norwich, was very concerned that the Church of England not fall behind and “that a seminary be erected in England to breed up persons to supply this mission for the future and that they there be instructed not only in all parts of good learning to enable them to withstand the oppositions of the popish priests.”⁸ The Counter-Reformation concern with defending the Roman Church throughout the world had finally affected England, and in the 1690s, it is almost as if English Protestants, perhaps seeing the efficacy of those missions in their own country, woke up to the challenge before them.

The implications of the missionary efforts were especially significant regarding education. Central to the Catholic mission was the project of educating young people. The religious orders were especially good at this.⁹ The students at Oxford and Cambridge were obviously a target, but it was in primary school education that Catholic clergy especially shone.¹⁰ At least ten schools in England were begun by Jesuits alone at this time, with the school in Lincoln becoming so crowded that new premises were sought. About sixty students, including Protestants who reportedly remained stubborn in their religious ideas, attended a school run by Father Henry Hamerton in Yorkshire and

⁸ Humphrey Prideaux to Tenison, 37 March 1695, MS 933, f. 2, p. 2-3, Lambeth Palace Library, London; A sea captain to Revd. Anton Wilhelm Boehm, 10 Jan 1713, MS 933, f. 116, Lambeth Palace Library, London; To Tenison from Anthony Marie de la Croze, 8 March 1715, MS 930, f. 38, p.2, Lambeth Palace Library, London.

⁹ *Pastoral Letter from the Bishop of Meaux*, 36.

¹⁰ Lord President from L. W. Finch, Sept. 1688, Add MS 32095, f. 270, British Library, London.

he had to hire a secular schoolmaster because he was gone so frequently.¹¹ Even Wales had a boarding school. Narcisuss Luttrell not only recorded the setting up of a Jesuit school at the Savoy, but seems to imply that the Protestant free schools set up in 1688 in St. Martin's Lane and St. James were intended to compete with the free Catholic schools which had been established in those locations a few years earlier.¹² The College at the Savoy was the crown jewel of Catholic education in England, admitting not only Catholics, but hundreds of Protestants as well.¹³ The Mostyn Newsletters report that Father Poulton at the Savoy was "an affable man. . . who teaches a different method from our English Schools and all Gratis."¹⁴ The high academic prowess of the students spoke well for the school, and the Catholic students competed with Protestant scholars and apparently bested them.¹⁵

So, when the leaders of the Reformation of Manners movement such as Robert Fleming argued for more schools, they were well aware of the tradition of Catholic schools in whose steps they followed.¹⁶ Maurice Wheeler, schoolmaster in the Gloucester Cathedral school, wrote to Archbishop Tenison to promote the establishment of good quality cathedral schools, which he argued could easily gain the scholarly reputation currently sustained by the Jesuits.¹⁷ The promotion of their ideas and goals through voluntary societies, focused on pastoral care and education, rallying the lay people, and

¹¹ Foley, *Records of the English Province*, vol. 5, 62, 650, 727, 267.

¹² *Brief Historical Relation of State Affairs*, 404, 426, 424.

¹³ Macpherson, *History of Great Britain*, vol. 1, 149; *The Rules of the Schools at the Jesuits in Fanchurch-Street*, London.

¹⁴ Bangor University Archives. Mostyn Manuscripts 9083. April 28 1687

¹⁵ Foley, *Records of the English Province*, vol. 5, 302; Darrell, *Vindication of St. Ignatius*, viii.

¹⁶ Fleming, *Present Aspect of Our Times*, 27. See also *Art of Catechizing*, i.

¹⁷ Maurice Wheeler to Tenison, 11 Feb. 1699, MS 929, f. 49, pp. 2-3, 5, Lambeth Palace Library, London; The academies of the dissenters were also seen by many to be a real threat to the Church of England because Anglicans sent their sons to these schools, and then the young people were seduced away from the Church. See Add MS 28252, f. 86, British Library, London.

reviving the importance of public sermons—all these were well-remarked tactics of the Catholic missionaries and often overtly referenced by the Reformation of Manners leadership. The tactics for promoting religious renewal had changed with the new competition—and under James II, so had some of the content of the spiritual revival and discourse.

Emphasis on Good Works

The concern with reform of behavior, and the emphasis on moral action as core to Christianity rather than theology/ideology, had been pioneered by the Catholic apologists of the previous decade. Perhaps there is something about feeling defensive, about trying to seize an opportunity (which Tony Claydon has pointed out that people like Burnet argued was true for the 1690s and Protestants), that prods groups towards greater irenicism.

During the Catholic missionary effort, practical Christianity, “good works,” had been the point on which all the polemicists could agree. The Catholic sermons and literature that promoted such ideals had been most popular—even appropriating that oh-so-Protestant term “Reformation” to describe this emphasis on moral behavior. “Ah Christians! What can be more convincing than the practical Arguments of our divine Savior?” Bonaventure Giffard exhorted his congregation. “Are you willing that Jesus Christ should make a total Change, an entire Conversion, a thorough Reformation in your Soul?”¹⁸ “As long as pulpits employ themselves in correcting the vices of the Congregation, in teaching them to lead good lives, not to use Frauds, nor Cheat, or Lie, nor Swear, nor Blaspheme, to avoid all Excesses, etc., I commend, I applaud them,”

¹⁸ Bonaventure Giffard, *A Sermon of the Nativity of our Lord* (London, 1688), 14, 23.

wrote John Gother.¹⁹ Their vigorous debate with Protestants during the reign of James II put good works back on the table, especially as Catholic writers accused Protestants of promoting a theology that resulted in lax living. “I don’t think this grim divinity [Anglican theology] to be the properest method for making converts,” another Catholic preacher asserted, adding that “I cannot but suspect that Man’s Religion who overthrows all principles of Morality, whilst he’s contending to show himself the better Christian.”²⁰ One of the attacks that William Darrell made against Protestantism was to accuse it of promoting immorality, arguing that Luther “cry’d out Reformation of Manners to let in Deformation.”²¹ Catholics sought to set themselves up as promoting a religion that would result in changed lives, lives guided by morals that all Christians could agree were good.²² This was widely recognized by Protestants at the time as not only a strong tactic on the Catholics’ part, but represented a concern that hit all-too-close to home: for what Christian pastor could deny that the behavior of his parishioners left something to be desired? To be seen as less concerned with this than was the “papist” competition was intolerable.²³

¹⁹ Gother, *Pulpit-Sayings: Or the Characters of the Pulpit Papist Examined* (London, 1688), ii; Philip Ellis, *A Second Sermon before Their Majesties* (London, 1687), 24-26; also his *First Sermon Preached Before Their Majesties* (London, 1687), 26, 29; Bossuet, *Doctrine of the Catholic Church*, 3, 12, 17; Gother, *Agreement Between the Church of England and the Church of Rome*, 16; Basset, *Reason and Authority*, 12; John Sergeant, *The Fourth Catholick Letter* (London, 1688), 35.

²⁰ John Gother, *The Pope’s Supremacy Asserted* (London, 1688), 8; Henry Foley, *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus*, vol. 5, (London: Burnes and Oates, 1879), 152.

²¹ William Darrell, *A Vindication of St. Ignatius* (London, 1688), i. Ellis, *First Sermon*, 4; Thomas Ward also cited his conversion as “an influence on his Manners in general,” *England’s Reformation* 6th ed. (London, 1772), viii.

²² An eighteenth-century Protestant editor of an edition of William Darrell’s *Moral Reflections on Select Passages* (London, 1736) explained that Protestants should feel at ease reading this Catholic work because “the subjects he treats of are merely of a moral nature, and such as are common to both persuasions, being intended, not to inform the Reader’s understanding, or to instruct him in matters of faith, but to animate his piety,” Edward Gee, *A Sermon Preached before the Queen* (London, 1692), v.

²³ William Wake’s Diary, 1688, MS 2932, p. 57b, Lambeth Palace Library, London; Burnet, *History of My Own Time*, vol. 3, 122; Burnet, *A Letter to a Lord upon his Happy Conversion* (London, 1688), 1, 2; Stillingfleet, *Second Letter to Mr. G.*, 40-41; Robert Hancock, *The Loyalty of Popish Principles Examined* (London, 1686), 190.

This concern with true Reformation Protestantism as needing to be associated with good behavior, especially in the face of the potential Catholic menace was laid out just after the Glorious Revolution. “We got the reputation of good protestants by [bringing in William], though I fear not good men,” one author complained in a letter to Parliament, “if that some of us have not onely shone ourselves religiously concerned for our Religion but in some respect not in honesty.”²⁴ Protestants as well as Catholics filled their literature with affirmations of all who lived a righteous life, clearly using Reformation as a polemical tool. William Wake, when asked to preach before the queen, although he had been known to attack Catholicism, chose to “preach a Sermon wholly practical” as the best means of avoiding controversy.²⁵ Gilbert Burnet, argued that the best way to counteract “the mocks of the Roman Catholics” was to live a godly life.²⁶ Edward Stillingfleet commented that he had “long wondered at this kind of missionary zeal . . . against Error, . . .when so much less zeal is shown against Men’s Passions and Vices.”²⁷ John Woodhouse, who regularly preached before the Societies for the Reformation of Manners, explained that it was during the reign of James II, when the threat of popery loomed large, that people began to understand that good living was the best way to promote reformation:

For when their Diana, popery and profaneness, had a hopeful Prospect; they found there was a sort of Persons (the Remains of the Old Puritans) who were not fully of the way of the Established church (which they thought wanted a fuller Reformation) who by their Preaching and Living, gave great Rebuke to what was doing.²⁸

²⁴ To the Lords upon the present condition of Government, 1688/9, DDCa 17/214, f. 9, Lancashire Record Office, Preston, England; Howe, *Carnality of Religious Contention*, 49; John Howe, *Of Charity* (London, 1683), 49; ²⁴ *The Trial and Examination of a Late Libel*, in *Somers Tracts*, vol. 9, 206-207.

²⁵ William Wake’s Diary, 1688, MS 2932, p. 57b, Lambeth Palace Library, London.

²⁶ Burnet, *A Letter to a Lord upon his Happy Conversion* (London, 1688), 1, 2.

²⁷ Stillingfleet, *Second Letter to Mr. G.*, 40-41; Calamy, *Historical Account*, 170-171.

²⁸ Woodhouse, *Call to Reformation*, 38.

“Practical Christianity” was the lesson learned from the debates with the Catholics.

I will not include here another discussion about the ways in which ecumenical activity and Christian unity took on a different tone during the debates with Catholics and may have forged some of the bonds that led to a sort of pride in the ecumenical nature of the Societies. Catholics had certainly tried to reach out while maintaining their identity (Glickman is working on a discussion for the union of Anglicans and Catholics during Charles’s reign), and this became much more common in the 1690s. William Da Calamy, *Historical Account*, 170-171. rrell and Sylvester Jenks both wrote works of general morality which were recommended to Protestants as good for moral improvement.

The leaders of the Reformation of Manners movement were both worried about the Catholic competition as well as impressed with the manner in which the Roman apologists had established their Christian credentials. It was paramount in the new, post-Toleration Act context that Protestants also demonstrate that they were concerned with morality and good behavior. The possibility of atheism, quirky heterodoxy (Socinianism et al) and other immorality which Catholics had bemoaned as the fruit of Protestant theology had to be combated thoroughly. In many ways, the increased privatization and moralization of faith and religious practice had been pioneered by Catholics in England who had long had practice in operating without the thick support of an ecclesiastical structure.

Perhaps it was the climate, maybe the shared experience, perhaps the situation for Catholics under James was similar to what certain kinds of Protestants felt they were experiencing with William—but the connections and overlaps are too tantalizing to leave

alone. The movement toward mystical experiences, morality and rationalism that seem to pop up everywhere in the 1690s were certainly part of the Catholic experience as well, as Gabriel Gilckman has shown. The theological connections, personal relationships, and reactions/observations of Catholics regarding the Reformation of Manners itself in the 1690s still need to be explored. The intentional modeling of missions on the Catholic example is possible, and needs more study. But lay leadership, ecumenical outreach, a revival of pastoral care, emphasizing the shared concerns for righteous living that all Christians could rally around, and especially in their concern for education and promoting right living through right thinking in sermons and other publications all seem to be common concerns and tactics in the 1680s and 1690s, whether one was a Presbyterian or an English secular priest.