The Catholic Response to the Protestant Reformation

ARGUMENT
Using the Théatrum Crudelitatum, Catholics from the 16th century responded to pressures from the rising Protestant movement with the familiar rhetoric of martyrdom. The contents of this book indicate the turmoil of the Protestant Reformation and highlight the intense doctrinal differences between Christian faiths as well their cultural similarities and differences.

CATHOLIC PRACTICES

The Catholic church under Pope Leo X sold “indulgences,” which lessened one’s punishment for sin.

Biblical texts were read only by church clergy, and only in Latin. Catholics not versed in Latin relied on images and icons (i.e. stained glass) to understand.

The Catholic church created and maintained a “monopoly” on Christian salvation in the western hemisphere.

Artwork, expensive furnishings, elaborate woodwork, and stained glass adorned ornate Catholic cathedrals. They honored God, informed churchgoers, and demonstrated the immense wealth of the church.

IN THE BOOK
Q: Who was the author?
A: Richard Rowlands. Richard was a writer, an engraver as well as a connoisseur of books.

Q: Why was the book written in Latin?
A: The book was written in Ecclesiastical Latin which was the liturgical language at the time for the Roman Catholic Church.

Q: Is this book in its original form?
A: Mostly. The 50 blank pages at the end of the book indicate that it has been re-bound. The book as well has been rebound.

Q: How are the pages marked?
A: The book has page numbers as well as folio numbers written inside. Judging by this, we can infer that the book was written when society was transitioning numbering each folio, to the numbering pages in the modern manner.

PROTESTANT VIOLATIONS

In Martin Luther’s 95 Theses, he denied the idea that salvation could be purchased.

Protestants believed the Bible should be available in one’s native language and that scripture (rather than clergy) should be the foundation of religious experience. Literacy grew.

Protestantism introduced an alternative path to salvation. The individual’s personal relationship with God was emphasized.

Good works paved the way to heaven. Confession, penance, and fulfillment of religious rites and rituals called “sacraments” granted observant souls grace.

Protestants rejected the worship of relics and the elaborate displays present in cathedrals. Churches were stripped bare of color and symbolism. Church became less of a visual experience. Literacy grew.

ART AND SYMBOLISM

The art is propaganda to show the atrocities, but also (and arguably more importantly) to show the devotion of the victims/martyrs. Must have “patient endurance of suffering” while showing “gratitude to God” (so the praying with calm demeanors).

If viewing the victims/martyrs as a group, show all alike (i.e. many people). Must show “patient endurance of suffering,” but also (and arguably more importantly) to show the devotion of the victims/martyrs. Must have “patient endurance of suffering.”

PART OF A GREATER TRADITION

The practice of recording the lives and deaths of saints was not original to the Reformation. In fact, it had long been a part of the Christian tradition, where the main figure of Jesus Christ was often considered to be the ultimate martyr himself. Throughout the middle ages, some of the most popular books were those of Saints’ Lives, which contained many stories of early Christians in the first, second, and third centuries who had been persecuted by the Romans. Saints’ Lives were an especially popular phenomenon in England: one of the most famous authors was Aelfric, who ran the Church in England in the eleventh century. Another was Bede, the first English historian, who wrote the Life of Cuthbert in the seventh century. An entire genre of Saints’ Lives in Middle English popped up between the times of the Norman Invasion and the Reformation.

There were a few important distinctions between Medieval Saint’s Lives and post-Reformation martyrologies, however. First, some of the older authors like Aelfric would actually avoid the more gruesome details of a story in order to focus on the religious piety of the saints. Clearly, this was not the case in Crudelitatum. Secondly, pre-Reformation Catholics differentiated between Martyrs and Confessors: martyrs were those who died for the faith, and confessors were the holiest of people whose stories deserved telling just because they were a good example. Post-Reformation, those became conflated. Lastly, the Old Fathers of English Catholicism had written in the vernacular in order to reach more people. After the Reformation, the Catholic Church buckled down on its use of Latin in all religious texts, even the popular ones.

BACKGROUND

During the 15th century, the Renaissance resulted in new forms of religious theology all across Europe. These theologies later fueled the Protestant Reformation when opposition in doctrine led many to break away from the Catholic Church. Both sides persecuted each other to buttress their argument that the other was wrong. Our book focuses on the response of the Catholic Church when Protestants began to massacre Catholic clergy.

CITATIONS


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