

***The Great Catholic Reformers: From Gregory the Great to Dorothy Day. C. Colt Anderson. New York: Paulist Press, 2007.***

**Preface**

"I want to encourage every Catholic to take up the difficult task of reform. My hope is that people will find a model to inspire them that will suit their own temperaments and spiritual dispositions." [ix]

"... they were much more comfortable with the ambiguities in the scriptural texts than we are."  
[x]

**Introduction**

"... there are individuals and organizations that are seen as reformers, even though they advocate shrinking the church's catholicity by driving their neighbors out of our communion." [xiii]

Congar (1950): *Vrai et fausse réforme dans l'église* as key text.

Congar accepted the irreformability of the church's essential structure, composed of infallible dogma (revelation), the sacraments, and hierarchical constitution. [xiv]

This provides a mystical unity that cannot be destroyed, yet our lived unity can always be corrected/improved. [xiv]

Catholic theological concern with the irreformable became "a serious impediment to the type of self-criticism necessary for any spiritual organism or institution to grow in holiness." [xiv]

Congar decried such an apologetic as "an attempt to defend everything, " which "required people to split the sanctity and perfection of the church from its historical reality." With a "bifurcated church," such apologists "simply do not see reality as it is." [xiv]

Congar identified four characteristics of legitimate reform:

1. Frank and direct in presenting critiques;
2. Serious intellectual foundations;
3. 3. Involves and empowers the laity; and
4. Begins in a return to the sources of tradition. [xv]

"Resentment occurs when people recognize that the church is straying from its tradition." [xv]

"... tradition begins by maintaining received ways of proceeding and speaking, but it also recognizes authentic developments or improvements resulting from the necessities of the hour."  
[xv]

Return to the sources allows reform to occur without destroying the unity of Catholic communion. [xv]

“... tradition contains within itself the resources or the ability to adopt to new situations.” [xv]

Recovery of tradition is preceeded by historical/scientific advances. [xvi]

The unity of the church “requires that all of the orders of the church collaborate in reform.” [xvi]

“Following the council of Trent, reform became a four-letter word in the Catholic Church.” Newman “helped to restore the place of reform in the church by recovering an appropriate sense of historical development.” [xviii]

Anderson’s examples “were all recognized as having authority because of their service to the mission of the church – the salvation of souls.” [xx]

“... reformers can become oppressive and legalistic when they forget that their goal is to save rather than condemn.” [xx]

Refusing to life in the creative and unpredictable tension of reform “is to reject reality for an abstraction, to choose ideology over truth, and to follow the path of vengeance rather than penance.” [xxi]

### **ONE: GREGORY THE GREAT**

The darkness and sufferings of the late 6<sup>th</sup> century led Gregory I to believe the end of the world was at hand, which provided a sense of urgency. “Both the terrible nature of his times and his sense of urgency for saving souls goaded Gregory to embark on the road to reform.” [1]

“Factors that influence society also influence the church; and the church, like a white blood cell, releases its healing message into society.” [2]

Gregory saw the church’s mission as *cura animarum*, a medical image. [2]

### **The Diagnosis**

“Just as the church was having some impact on Roman society in terms of justice, the Roman Empire began to have a dramatic effect on the Church’s property.” [4]

Gregory was “well aware of the impact of Roman society on the prophetic nature of the church.” [4]

### **Society’s Effect on the Church**

“The church’s relationship with the empire was at once beneficial and detrimental to its institutional integrity.” [4]

“Clerical worldliness led to the first major reform movement in the church, monasticism.” [4]

Monks pushed clerics to more ascetical life. “Gregory’s election as the first monastic pope, was a watershed moment for monastic reformers who wanted a clergy more focused on humility and service than on ruling over people as imperial bureaucrats.” [4]

Situation: warfare, plague, famine, widespread simony, anti-Semitism. [6]

Gregory initially wanted to decline election. [6]

### **Gregory's Plan of Attack**

In face of plague and famine, Gregory "set new precedents in terms of papal and Episcopal responsibilities to the poor and oppressed." [7]

Gregory's clergy dissented, having personal interest in preserving a system which operated to their benefit. [7]

"Gregory created a circle of reformers drawn from the monasteries to help him achieve his goals and to dilute the influence of an entrenched diocesan clergy." [7]

Gregory preached the care of souls and the fear of God. [7]

"Gregory believed that it is the tendency to move away from humility that requires ongoing ecclesial reform." [8]

### **Ecclesial Reform**

Reform is frequently opposed by positing various 'perfections' of the church, from which any 'reform' would be "a movement toward imperfection." [8]

"Gregory employed the exegetical tradition of interpreting multiple senses of scripture to explain how the church could be in need of reform" (following John Cassian). [9]

Interpreting Jerusalem as symbol of church, e.g., enables one to hear the church addressed by God as spouse, whore, and mother. [9]

Gregory also interpreted Job as symbol of church. [9]

"... the salvation of the church as a whole and the salvation of the individual reflect each other in Gregory's theology. Both begin in fear over faults. Both withdraw from those faults by a firm intention of the will and by right thinking." [10]

"When Job is described as covered with wounds and oozing puss, Gregory said this shows how the church is wounded by its evil and tepid members." [10]

"... patience becomes one of the distinguishing characteristics in discerning between the reformer and the schismatic." [10]

"Gregory was worried about the consequences of triumphalistic ecclesiology for the church's credibility... If people believe the true church is the perfect church, then they become incapable of recognizing the wounded church, which takes the evils of the world into itself as the means to its purification." [10]

The church is not perfect, but is to be perfected. The church is wounded, and the only appropriate response is to work to heal it. [10]

### **Administrative Reform**

State of Italian clergy was scandalous; Gregory deposed six bishops. [12]

Gregory worked to promote reforming candidates for the episcopacy. [13]

### **Social Justice**

“Gregory’s concern was to call all Christians to be witnesses to the peace and justice of the eschatological kingdom.” [15]

He was “the first pope to organize charitable operations.” [16]

In doing so, he burdened papal finances and encountered clerical resistance. [16]

“Because the mission of the church is to save sinners, whether they are powerful or oppressed, rich or poor, free or subjugated, the perpetrators of injustice needed to be warned of the severity of the coming judgment.” [16]

### **Discernment, Clericalism, and Ecclesial Authority**

Humility is the fundamental virtue to be discerned. [19]

“... asceticism was seen as a sign of the probability of holiness.” [20]

“A good bishop, according to Gregory, takes the free and sincere criticism of his people as respectful recognition of his humility.” [20]

“Because of his ecclesiastical power, a bishop who falls into the trap of conceit, Gregory argued, assumes he has more merit and wisdom than those without power.” [21]

“A man is made like the apostate angel when he distains, though a man, to be like other people.” [21]

### **The Apologetics and Polemics of Humility**

“... reformers who lack discernment fall into the same errors as the people they want to change.” [22]

The authority of lesser clergy and laity also rests on humility. [22]

“It is the humble Christian who has the authority to correct bishops.” [22]

“... being humble does not mean being silent and passive. This willingness to criticize or admonish superiors is the result of true humility, which grows out of the fear of God.” [22]

“Fear of God drives out all other fears and considerations that hold us in bondage to the opinions of other people.” [23]

“... the humble person, having stripped away his or her own pretensions, does not give credence to the pretensions of others.” [23]

“Those who wish to correct the evil deeds of others must begin by applying the principles of discernment to themselves.” [23-24]

“It is by humility that we make progress toward salvation.” [24]

Gregory "loved to incorporate stories of those who were despised or seen as unimportant saving those who were important and even those who were, in fact, holy." [24]

"For Gregory, it was clear God uses the evil members to teach us that we should not be presumptuous about either our status or the status of others in the church." [24]

"False reformers forget that they do not know when God may lift someone up with his grace. They presume to usurp God's judgment and to condemn people themselves. Some who claim to be reformers are simply rebelling against the ascetic disciplines of self-denial so they can indulge themselves... In this way their only guide becomes their own self-interest." [24]

"... the false reformer grounds his or her authority in self-righteousness." [25]

"... the Christian reformer must temper zeal with discernment if he or she wishes to heal rather than to destroy." [25]

"Gregory urged everyone to recognize that the people they despise are the very people God will use to save them." [25-26]

### **Gregory's Legacy**

"By pointing out the imperfections and even sinfulness of the church, Gregory provided later reformers with a theological justification for their critiques." [27]

"For Gregory, reforming the church is essentially the task of calling individuals and groups to follow the example of Christ and the saints by their humble service." [27]

"Christian authority rises out of service to others." [27]

"... a spirituality of reform that balances the need to reform with the need to maintain the unity of faith, which he called the bond of love." [27-28]

Patience is the essential virtue for maintaining unity. [28]

"Like Christ, the pilgrim church bears the evils of the world even as it works to purify them." [28]

"... people should not expect to bring the church to perfection, because the reality is that the church brings us to perfection by stirring us to reform ourselves, our communities, our leaders, and our world." [28]

### **TWO: PETER DAMIAN - THE DOCTOR OF REFORM**

Primary problems of the era (1007-1072): buying/selling ecclesiastical offices, clerical sexuality, lack of order in collections of canon law. [30]

"The idea of the church as a community had almost disappeared in the eleventh century. One of the key goals of the reformers was to root out simony and to recover a more communal understanding of the church." [30]

Re: sexuality – “Most of the reformers were solely interested in the issue of ritual purity” – not concerned about the treatment of concubines. [31]

“Peter Damian’s efforts against clerical concubinage shifted over time as he began to move beyond ritual concerns to seeing the inherent abuse of power involved in these relationships.” [31]

The worst problem was priests/bishops compelling boys into acts of sodomy. [31]

“... a prudent silence is maintained concerning clerical sexuality for fear of insults from the laity. But this is something that badly needs correction, so that precisely what all the people are complaining about should not be hushed up in council by the leaders of the church.” [32]

“... collaborative model of reform between the laity, religious, and clergy.” [32]

“... one of a handful of medieval theologians who supported the idea that the common people have a right to rebel against unjust rulers.” [33]

### **Peter and the Papal Reform Movement**

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, reformers sought to strengthen the papacy, which was the only institution with sufficient authority to check the power of bishops and archbishops. [33]

“Peter Damian helped to formulate the rhetoric the reformers needed.” [35]

Reformers’ arguments for demanding clerical celibacy was “almost exclusively based on the authority of canon law.” But ascribing virtually absolute authority to canon law is inherently problematic; law changes throughout history and cannot have absolute authority – there must be recourse to higher authority to justify/guide such changes. [36]

### **Spiritual Incest**

“According to Peter, the problem of homosexual acts among the clergy and with the laity was pervasive in the church of his day.” [38]

*Contra* Cardinal Humbert, Peter Damian accepted the validity of the sacramental acts of impure priests – otherwise, people could never know if sacraments were valid, because they could never know the purity of priests with certainty. [39]

Peter Damian argued from the filial relationship of bishop/priests to people to the incestuous nature of sexual acts between them. [40]

“Peter saw their failure to enforce ecclesiastical discipline as bringing the dignity of ecclesiastical office into disrepute.” [44]

He used the story of Eli (1 Samuel 2) as an example of how those in higher office must be punished more harshly. [44]

“Increasingly, his rhetoric shifted away from legal categories to spiritual ones like the fear of God.” [45]

### **Simony**

R.I. Moore: “... the apostolic succession was incorruptible by the vices of the successors.” [49]

As succeeding papacies sought to subject the laity to the will of the pope, Peter “began to more vigorously defend the laity’s role in reform at the end of his career.” [49]

### **Collaborative Reform**

Peter Damian argued that even women have the duty to correct eminent clergymen. [51]

“Peter’s position on the right and the duty of the laity to correct the clergy was increasingly at odds with the papal reform movement as envisioned by Gregory VII. Nonetheless, his justification for everyone, including women, to correct their ‘superiors’ continued to influence reformers well into the sixteenth century. Peter’s theology provided a counterbalance to the increasingly outlandish claims of papal authority.” [53]

### **Peter Damian’s Contribution to Catholic Reform**

“... proper order particularly demands that the worst offenses need to be made public.” [54]

“... publicly revealing the worst sins was the means to preserve the credibility of the church.” [54]

“... signals that it is not serious about its own laws, traditions, and mission.” [54]

“Peter’s greatest contribution to the idea of reform was that the church could be reformed as a whole.” [54]

“... the way Peter linked pastoral care to institutional reform increasingly became the standard norm for Catholic reformers in the succeeding centuries.” [55]

### **THREE: BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX – THE IMPOSSIBLE REFORMER**

“When scandals comes through vices being denounced, it comes through those who are blameworthy and not through those who blame it.” [56]

“Bernard [b. 1050] was renewing the concept of reform in light of its original meaning – of calling individuals to a conversion of heart.” [57]

“... he was extending and stretching the concept of reform to include the idea of progress.” [57]

“Bernard’s struggle with papal and curial ambition is an example of a repeating pattern in the history of the church: Programmatic and institutional reforms that solve one set of problems for one generation often becomes the source of scandals for the church in later generations.” [57]

“Bernard, who simply grounded his message in the pervasive power of Christian spirituality, understood reform as a renewal that belonged to the sphere of grace.” [57-58]

“Using the analogy of chronic illness allowed him to explain why reform efforts must be ongoing.” [58]

Reform = the body of Christ’s immune system. [58]

“The apologetics of love” – linking criticism/correction to love. [58]

“Bernard was one of the first reformers to defend the idea that new or better forms of life, ministry, and worship can develop in the church.” [59]

## **Progressive Reform**

"His rhetoric pointed to the need to discern between what is part of the divine revelation and what is merely human custom in canon law and church teaching." [59]

"... those who do not want to be better than previous generations are more likely to be imitating the sins of their ancestors than the virtues." [59]

Re: Jacob's ladder – "Either you must go up or you must come down, you inevitably fall if you try to stand still." [60]

"His emphasis on the affective dimension of the person, which includes feelings and desires, reflected the quickening of a new spirit of humanism that was reinvigorating European culture." [60]

"... he reformed a theology that attempted to ignore the beauty and power of carnality." [60]

"... response to a growing sense of legalism." [60]

Bernard perceived a connection between greed/ambition and focus on canon law by ecclesiastical climbers. [60]

## **Twelfth-Century Renewal**

Bernard "was concerned with the growing power and corruption of the Roman curia." [61]

As with the curia, also monasteries associated with Cluny had become both wealthy and influential. [62]

Cistercians tended to believe that Benedictines "had become corrupted by their growing wealth and secular involvement." [62]

"... reformers had to distinguish themselves from the growing number of dissenters, schismatics, and heretics. This led many of the reform movements to attack each other, making the twelfth century a time of incredible contention." [62]

The appeal of the Cathars lay in part in the contrast between their simplicity and the sumptuous wealth of the hierarchy. [63]

Rather than suppress the Cathars, Bernard argued that the church "should strive to correct them through preaching and by providing a good example." [63]

"The injustice of the church and its members simply provided ammunition for the Cathars." [63]

Twelfth century openness to new ideas. Gerhard Ladner points out how the language of reform was steeped in "'vitalistic' metaphors related to birth, rebirth, growth, flowering, spring, warmth, light, and life." [63]

Developmental understanding of the church. [63]

Shift "from an idea of reform that was strictly backward looking to one including a forward-looking perspective." [64]

## **Bernard's Apologia**



Cistercians “are one of the earliest international organizations to have a representative government.” They also admitted members from the middle and lower classes, opening possibilities previously reserved to the nobility. They also refused to accept oblations (children offered by parents). [64]

They also looked backward, in a more literal interpretation of the Rule of Benedict – evident in the practice of manual labor and poverty, as well as in simpler architecture and liturgies. [65]

Bernard defended “the legitimate diversity of forms of life, devotion, and liturgical observances.” [65]

“God gave all of these diverse observances because people are diverse in their spiritual needs.” (Josephs’ multicolored robe). [65]

“If there are different forms of equality in heaven, ... then it is legitimate and even praiseworthy to have different forms of equality on earth. [66]

Bernard chastised members of his community for judging others by Cistercian standards. [66]

“In this matter of disparaging your brothers, humility is lost when you put yourself up on a pedestal, and charity when you trample on others, and surely these are the great gifts.” [67]

“His most acerbic criticism was over the amount of gold, silver, jewels, and other riches that were being brought into monasteries and were being incorporated into Benedictine liturgies.” [68]

“He claimed their expensive décor and art captured the people’s attention but dried up their devotion.” [68]

“He scolded the great builders of churches and collectors of fine liturgical art: ‘The food of the poor is taken to feed the eyes of the rich.’” [68]

Bernard framed his criticism in a way that sought to reconcile Benedictines and Cistercians. [69]

He hoped each side could maintain to values “without passing judgment on those who think differently.” [69]

Bernard was consistently concerned with overemphasis on externals – whether Cistercian emphasis on the externals of ascetic observance, or Benedictine emphasis on the externals of architecture and ritual. [69]

### **On Conversion**

“By studying his rhetoric, we are better prepared to hear the words of Catholic reformers like Catherine of Siena and Jan Hus as well as Protestants like Luther.” [70]

“... one of the most powerful critiques of the unreformed clergy that one can find within the Catholic tradition.” [70]

“Judas priests”: have no gentleness with sinners, no sense of their own imperfection, feel no remorse. [71]

“His idea that true peacemakers, who also have to be true reformers, are certain to face opposition from established authorities is well grounded in the scriptural stories of the prophets, in the gospels, and in

the Acts of the Apostles. Bernard had effectively appropriated the pattern of the Suffering Servant to explain the ministry of the reformer.” [73]

“... he was calling people away from relying so heavily on juridical and legal categories.” [73]

#### **On Consideration Advice to a Pope**

“The very reforms that were aimed at strengthening the legal powers of the popes and cardinals became the source of new temptations in the form of legalism.” [74]

“Bernard warned the pope that he was heading toward a hard heart if he continued to devote all his energies to the administrative demands of the papacy without taking time for prayer and study.” [75]

“Ecclesial leaders should teach and administer, but they should leave legislation and governance to others. If the pope and the curia were to exercise their jurisdiction and power, Bernard argued it should be on behalf of the poor and the powerless, widows and orphans, and not for the wealthy and influential.” [76]

#### **Bernard of Clairvaux’s Continuing Influence**

“Many of the reformers had been seduced by their love of laws and institutions.” [77]

“... a sacramental carnality.” [77]

Bernard “sought to shift people’s attention away from the carnal desire for gold, beauty, and sex to the carnal desire to be with Christ, to imagine walking with him, to share a meal, to grieve over the passion, to rejoice in the resurrection. Bernard believed that our desire to touch and be touched, to stop and smell a sweet scent, to hear a good word, to taste and see all find their fulfillment in the incarnate Lord.” [78]

#### **FOUR: CLARE OF ASSISI – THE CLEAR MIRROR OF CHRIST**

Clare sought to teach two popes, as well as her father, “that women were capable of authentically living an apostolic life.” [80]

#### **Clare the Franciscan Reformer**

“As the first woman to write her own rule for her community, she demonstrated that women could govern themselves in community.” [81]

“Rather than demanding the recognition of rights, Franciscan reform demanded a willingness to be despised in order to save others.” [82]

Clare’s humility “allowed her to speak and to break out of her culturally assigned role, so we cannot expect to appreciate Clare as a reformer without a willingness to be open to her perspective.” [83]

“My working assumption is that Clare of Assisi was deliberate in drawing on a variety of traditional threads of thought about holy women. She wove these strands into a new altar cloth and symbolically demonstrated the central role of women in the living worship of the church.” [84]

“... she employed symbolic acts to create a type of rhetoric of life.” [84]

### **The Crumbling Church of the Thirteenth Century**

Re: the Cathars: "By the early thirteenth century, their simplicity and honesty had gained them a large following with the growing number of people who had good reason to be disenchanted with the church." [85]

"Popularity of Cathars and Waldensians rooted in a two-fold deficiency in the church: (1) ignorant clergy; (2) immoral clergy. [85]

With the birth of the Inquisition at the Fourth Lateran, reform had become a risky venture." [85]

The lay reformers who were successful drew upon the popular piety of the day, which was influenced by the idea of following the apostolic life (*vita apostolica*) and marked by a growing interest in the sacraments of penance and Eucharist." [85-86]

### **Mary of Oignies**

Thirteenth century: "religious revival helped the church to marginalize and ultimately overcome the popular heretics." [86]

The Beguines "taught people through their deeds. Their service to the sick and the poor and the marginalized shamed the clergy into admitting their own lack of apostolic zeal." [86]

The Beguines "helped to foster an environment that was friendly to lay expressions of the apostolic life." They "nurtured a spirit of creativity and openness to new forms of ministry." [88]

Mary helped significant clerics "reconnect to the language and concerns of the laity." [88]

Clare resisted the efforts of popes "to change the Poor Ladies into Benedictines." [89]

### **Franciscan Reform**

"Clare believed that the path to peace was poverty." She "believed it was necessary to give people more than they deserved to establish peace." [89]

"Francis and Clare perceived that it is impossible to overcome the human obsession with status and wealth through accumulating property and privileges." [89]

"By calling men and women to actively embrace and to steadfastly love evil people, Franciscan reform went beyond passive resistance." [90]

"... the only way to overcome fear is through love." [90]

By assuming the behavior and appearance of penitents, Franciscans took the lowest position in society and revealed their faithfulness to the church. [90]

By having nothing, they had nothing to protect – removing the source of endless disputes and quarrels. [91]

Francis urged members of his community to refrain from judging and condemning anyone. [91]

“Radically subversive” – “By desiring to give the bishops respect they did not deserve, Francis and Clare were imitating the way Christ desires to give to sinners the grace they do not deserve.” [91]

Common principle of medieval educational theory: people learn primarily through imitation. [92]

The Poor Ladies sought to provide living examples of Christian life. [92]

“Grateful for the gift of salvation, the sinner learns to be gracious with others.” [92]

“Those who possess the fear of God understand that if anyone stands to be pitied, it is the sinful bishop.” [92]

“Clare found herself engaged in a fight to win the privilege of poverty.” [93]

“Long before most women held positions of power in any arena Franciscan women were achieving doctorates, running hospitals, establishing colleges, and taking on roles that were traditionally reserved to men.” [93]

### **Clare of Assisi's Understanding of Women and Ministry**

In a homily on Mt 12.50, Gregory asserted that one who is a brother/sister of Christ through belief becomes His mother by preaching. Clare portrayed laypeople actively engaged in ministry as ‘mothers of Christ’ in a letter to Agnes of Prague. Gregory had explicitly referred to the preaching of Felicity. [94]

Clare’s reference to Agnes as a co-worker also recalled St. Paul’s designation of Prisca and Aquila and Phoebe. [95]

Clare’s community “was active in providing a healing ministry, in giving spiritual direction, and in preaching.” [95]

Her notion of “enclosure” allowed sisters to leave the monastery for ministerial work – “a new flexibility for religious women that had not existed since the time of the early church in the Latin West.” [95]

She “built a religious order dedicated to advancing the apostolic role of women in the church.” [96]

“Her fight to maintain her community’s ability to define itself and to preserve the privilege of poverty brings forward her qualities of fortitude and determination – qualities normally applied to men.” [96]

### **The Fight for Poverty**

In 1216, Clare sought exemption “from the requirement that monastic houses possess sufficient corporate property and goods to support them.” Innocent III granted the request. [96]

In granting the request, Innocent abrogated a provision of Lateran IV. [97]

When Gregory IX freed Franciscan friars from their obligation to serve as chaplain to the Poor Ladies, Clare threatened to lead her sisters in a hunger strike. Gregory relented. [98]

When Innocent IV wrote a rule that reduced the autonomy of the Poor Ladies – “Clare concluded that she must do something that no woman in the church had ever done. She decided she must write her own rule.” [98]

Concluded in 1253 (after six years of consultations) Innocent IV quickly approved the Rule of Clare so she would see it before her death. [99]

“Clare and her sisters taught the people around them that the desire to protect women from hardship and deprivation was a way of limiting their ability to actually join the race and ruin the prize of salvation.” [99]

“From a Franciscan perspective, the conversion of the heart is the result of learning to see Christ in the people we despise. Clare and the noble women who joined her tried to symbolically reflect Christ by hiding the highest nobility in human poverty, strength in weakness, freedom in manual labor, and salvation in shame.” [99]

### **The Bull of Canonization**

Innocent IV’s bull attributed to Clare many qualities traditionally attributed to good bishops. [101]

### **Epilogue**

Clare’s Rule was revoked after her death, and her sisters forced into enclosures, but “the Poor Clares evolved to meet the challenge by creating extern sisters and new forms of religious life.” [102]

“Franciscan women have played and continue to play a prominent role in exhorting and admonishing a selfish world to remember that we are saved by those we despise: the poor, the foreigners, the sick, and the imprisoned.” [102]

### **FIVE: CATHERINE OF SIENA -- The Insatiable Reformer**

In 1353, as a child, Catherine experienced a vision of Christ that led her to make a vow of virginity. As an adolescent, she began to eat only bread and raw vegetables. [103]

“The Catholic imagination began to run through some very dark alleys in the aftermath of the plague.” E.g., Catherine’s drinking puss from a woman’s infected breast. [104]

“Just as Catherine was not repulsed by the filth of her neighbors’ diseased bodies, she was also not repulsed by the corruption manifested in the body of Christ.” [104]

While she denied herself food, her ministry involved providing sustenance to the poor and suffering. [104]

“Her reform methods have a definite Thomistic and Dominican character.” [105]

Thomas: “... if the faith were endangered, a subject ought to reprove his or her prelate even publicly.” [105]

Catherine argued to Pope Gregory XI that rebellion against papal rule resulted from bad pastors and papal administrators. [105]

She contrasted Gregory XI with Gregory I's virtue and hunger for salvation. "This was a courageous stance for a fourteenth-century woman to take. It was, after all, a century when the church polluted the air with the smoke of burning women." [106]

### **The Babylonian Captivity**

Petrarch popularized the image of the Avignon papacy as the Babylonian Captivity. [109]

Both English and Italian Catholics saw the papacy of this era as having been "perverted for the aims of French foreign policy." [109]

Catherine's miracles – especially the stigmata – did much to support her claims of personal revelation from God concerning church reform, convincing Gregory XI to return to Rome. [110]

"... she framed her understanding of her ministry in terms of penance." [110]

### **Penitential Reform**

"Reformers who are united to Christ through love atone for their sins and for the sins of others." [111]

Since sin is infinite in its effects, and suffering is always finite in scope and devotion – suffering can never atone for sin. "... atonement can only be accomplished through our desire to love God," which can provoke infinite sorrow over sin. [111]

Both sin and atonement are communal realities. [111]

Charity transforms suffering into a sacramental reality that is able to atone for sin. [111]

Catherine saw the interdependence of clergy and laity as serving "to remind everyone of their own insufficiency." [112]

"The service of reform must spring from the infinite desire of love in such a way that the Christian soul must always keep her focus on the concrete needs of her neighbors." [113]

### **Strategy**

"As her disciples worked to reform themselves and the church, they had to avoid becoming judgmental of others." [113]

Thus, reformers maintain sight of their own need for humility. [113]

She promised her disciples that people who let go of selfishness will be able to peacefully and calmly seek to some rather than to condemn others." [113]

Three principles:

1. Your judgment should always be qualified;
2. Do not judge on appearances, and leave every judgment to Christ;
3. Do not try to force everyone to follow your path. [114]

"It was the certainty that Christ will return to judge the living and the dead that empowered Catherine to let go of her desire to punish sinners." [115]

Catholic reform "must be open to the reality that there are many paths to God within the church." [115]

As an exception, Catherine believed that when a Christian saw something clearly sinful, s/he should correct the sinner. [116]

“She was absolutely fearless in confronting both secular and political leaders. When they ignored her, Catherine publicly corrected them by exposing their sins to the world and to history.” [116]

### **Reform Rhetoric**

“... she proceeded to offer one of the most public, most powerful, and most courageous admonitions of the clergy presented by any reformer who remained in the Catholic Church.” [119]

“In their grasping for wealth, food, and luxury as people were suffering from famine, the plague, and financial collapses of the period, the clergy were devouring precious material resources in a time of want.” [119]

By their scandalous example they were spiritually devouring people’s souls. [119]

### **Conclusion**

“For Catherine, loving the church meant loving people; and thus reforming the church begins by reforming the selfishness that prevents us from loving others.” [122]

## **SIX: WHEN REFORMERS COLLIDE – JEAN GERSON AND JAN HUS**

Hus’s “claims of innocence were certain evidence of his guilt under the peculiar logic employed by the Inquisition.” [123]

### **The Great Schism**

George Tavard: “In times of social unrest political interests may force canon lawyers to run amok.” [125]

“Hus was fighting to preserve order in his local church, which was being solicited for indulgences, manipulated by the king, riddled with simony, and threatened by interdict. Gerson was primarily interested in restoring order on a universal scale by ending the papal schism” [126]

### **Jean Gerson: Conciliarist**

Unlike most medieval cathedrals, at Rheims “the figures of authority such as the angels, apostles, and saints smile down benevolently at the faithful. The beautiful order of the Gothic cathedral may have helped to mold his vision of church as ordered hierarchy.” [126-127]

“Gerson’s reform agenda was founded upon restoring the links between office and duty or between ecclesiastical rank and service.” [127]

“... more than anything else it was Jan Hus’s opposition to John XXIII’s misguided attempt to finance war against Ladislav of Naples by selling indulgences that brought Hus to stand trial on charged of heresy in Constance.” [132]

### **Jan Hus**

“One of the favorite themes in his early sermons was that only faith formed in love, or faith expressed in works of charity, is saving faith.” [134]

Hus preached intensely against “heresy, simony, and the moral faults of the unreformed clergy.” [135]

John XIII authorized the sale of indulgences in 1411 to support a crusade against Ladislas. Hus publicly opposed this. [136]

“He argued that it was improper for Christians to give money for the purpose of killing other Christians and that the pope and clergy should not be fighting with the material sword or engaging in warfare.” [136]

“He also opposed the way the bull seemed to imply that no repentance was necessary for forgiveness.” [136-137]

Hus went into exile to prevent the imposition of an interdict, but continued to write (*The Six Errors*). [137]

Hus argued that laity were as much a part of the church as clergy, that tithes should be offered freely, that heretics should not be executed, that civil authorities may deprive clergy of possessions. [138ff]

“The focus at Constance was resolving the Great Schism and preventing new schisms in the future, and anyone who stood in the way would be sacrificed for restoring unity.” [139]

### **Council of Constance**

John Wyclif, who had been dead for decades, was declared an obstinate heretic. “Normally one had to be alive to be obstinate, which is why a person was supposed to be alive to be charged with heresy.” [142]

This provided a basis for condemning Hus. [142]

“Hus was a victim of the inquisitorial method. On one level, a heretic was one who denied the authority of the church. So when the church charged a person with heresy, the only way someone could demonstrate that he or she was obedient was to accept the charge. Any attempt to defend oneself against the charge of heresy was seen as proof of heresy.” [143]

“Hus was caught in the trap of his own scrupulosity over morals.” The only way to save his life was to perjure himself. [144]

Constance succeeded in ending the Schism, but did so at the price of not attending to the need for reform. This failure left in place the situation that a century later would occasion the Reformation. [146]

### **Conclusion**

“In the late Middle Ages theology took on an axiomatic quality, which tended to push theology to extreme positions.” [147]

Neither man was able to see how the clergy and the laity have to constantly maintain mutual accountability, mutual patience, and mutual mercy in a balanced way.” [147]



They had much in common. "The difficulty comes from trying to express these ideas in legal and jurisdictional terms." [147]

Gerson and Hus offer a cautionary tale: Gerson as theological absolutist, Hus as moral absolutist – or classicism/scrupulosity. [148]

"... they failed to see that these virtues [humility and charity] demand acceptance of legitimate diversity within the church in terms of theological ideas on the one hand and in terms of the moral qualities of church members on the other." [148]

### **SEVEN: GASPARO CONTRARINI – CHRIST'S DIPLOMAT**

Contrarini had had an experience similar to Luther's 'tower experience,' the foundation of his idea of a gracious and merciful God. [151]

Contrarini had been a business and civic leader before becoming a priest and cardinal. [151]

"His willingness to work for peaceful reconciliation between people helped him bring together a coalition of reformers with different aims, temperaments, and theologies." [151-152]

The low point of the church's moral credibility was also the high point of its patronage of the arts and aesthetics. [152]

### **Abuses in the Early Renaissance Church (1475-1512)**

"The popes of this period... were lavish in their spending on their relatives, art, building projects, mistresses, or wars." [155]

To raise money, they sold benefices. People invested in benefices, making them resistant to reform. [155]

"... the church had become economically oppressive." [155]

"... the clergy resorted to the selling of indulgences, charging fees for reserved sins, and peddling dispensations as a voluntary way to raise funds." [155]

"concubinage tax" – a priest could pay a fine to his bishop and keep his mistress, which made it profitable to bishops for their priests to have mistresses. [156]

The emergence of the 'Protestants' made it difficult for Catholic reformers to continue their work – Contrarini's political acumen helped them to do so. [157]

### **Contrarini and the Catholic Reformers before 1517**

Three major groups of reformers:

1. Grassroots efforts to reform individuals;
2. Institutional reform of canon law, abolition of corrupt practices;
3. Apocalyptic reformers, employing fiery prophecies of doom and destruction.

These groups shared a concern for reinvigorating the mission of pastoral care and for the reform of the individual.

“Renaissance reformers employed the apologetics of decline and rebirth, which posited a virtually perfect early church that fell into decline over time.” Such inevitable decline required “periodic moments of rebirth and renewal.” [158]

Recovery of classical Greek and Latin sources on the nature of history influenced this. “The ancient idea of history as a decline from a glorious antiquity came to sieve the European imagination during the Renaissance.” [158]

Contrarini wrote a treatise opposing condemnation of Savonarola, and another on reforming the office of bishop. The latter had been occasioned by the appointment of a teenager as bishop of Bergamo. [160]

He denounced Episcopal absenteeism, and argued that charity is the chief virtue required of a bishop. [161]

“Since pastoral care begins with accepting that people are different and that circumstances vary, Contrarini tried to show the young bishop that he could not afford to be rigid.” [162]

The humanist reformers did not recognize the systemic root (benefices) of many problems. [163]

“... because the ecclesiastical revenue system associated with benefices, indulgences, and dispensations tended to promote men motivated by financial or political gain, reform efforts on a diocesan level frequently died when the reforming bishop died.” [163]

Luther recognized and attacked the system itself. [163]

After 1517, Catholic reformers needed “to reform their agenda to account for both systemic problems and theological confusion.” [164]

### **Ambassador and Statesman**

His diplomatic career helped Contrarini develop the skills which “granted him an acute ability to understand the intentions and motivations of other people.” [164]

Study of theology helped him develop this openness; from Aquinas and Dionysius, Truth/God “absolutely transcends our minds.” [164]

“... he became suspicious of the tendency to try to make any one point of view absolute.” [164]

This included the humility of recognizing the limited nature of his own ideas/beliefs. [164]

Arguing on behalf of Venetian citizens before the Spanish Inquisition, he found the Inquisition to be “a most terrible thing.” [165]

“Contrarini came to see how the lack of intellectual humility could be quite insidious and dangerous within the church.” [165]

“He charged the council of the Inquisition with having departed from the Catholic tradition by trying to suppress books.” [165]

Contrarini became involved with members of the Roman Oratory, befriending the future Pope Paul IV, who, as bishop, addressed the issue of “Episcopal accountability for the pastoral care of their people.” [166]

As Venetian ambassador to Pope Clement VII, Contrarini learned of problems/abuses associated with the papacy. [166]

As Cardinal, Contrarini called for an end to the papal state, and for a more spiritualized papacy. [167]

He proposed this response to Luther: “good will, love of God and one’s neighbor, humility of soul in order to do away with avarice, luxury, large households, and courts; and to limit oneself to that which the Gospels prescribe.” [167]

“He firmly believed that presenting theological arguments would be useless in reconciling Catholics and Protestants.” [168]

Paul III brought Contrarini to Rome to signal a seriousness about reform. [168]

Contrarini and associates offered an analysis of problems and a program for reform that would be addressed by Trent. [168-169]

### **The Consilium**

“... the product of men skilled in Renaissance rhetoric and schooled in the history of reform.” [169]

“... they laid much of the blame for systemic corruption on the various Renaissance popes and the canon lawyers who served them” [169]

“... described the growing trend in canon law to see the pope as completely unaccountable.” [169]

“... recognition that if the church is a visible and organic society on earth, then it is also governed by the laws and constants of what we would call political science.” [170]

Reform would accordingly involve refraining from casual dispensation from law. [170]

Among the abuses highlighted were the poor quality of men ordained to the priesthood, poor clerical education, and the entire benefice system. [171]

“The report identified the cardinals as the worst offenders.” [172]

“In particular, the commission felt that people should not be allowed to buy absolution from the sin of simony.” [173]

The document was not well received – not surprising, given its bluntness. It was argued that it conceded too much to the Lutherans. Its recommendations were “put on hold.” [174]

### **Contrarini’s Legacy**

For four years (1536-1540) he worked to reform the datary, making recommendations that would have cut its revenue (from the sale of benefices, dispensations, etc.) in half. They were rejected. [174]

Contrarini protected Ignatius of Loyola from the Inquisition, and helped win papal approval for the Jesuits. [175]

Contrarini served as papal legate to the Regensburg Colloquy, the last attempt at Catholic-Protestant reconciliation until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Significant agreements were reached, but substantial differences remained. [175]

“In the end, the Regensburg Colloquy served to clarify the depth and significance of the disagreements between the Catholics and the Protestants.” [175]

Contrarini died shortly thereafter, and his life’s efforts appeared to be a failure. [175]

Yet, four years later, Trent would enact many of his reform proposals. [176]

“He spent his last year under a cloud of suspicion, as he watched the Catholic Church take an increasingly hostile position toward the Protestants.” [176]

“Gasparo Contrarini’s career shows us that men and women who are active in the world have insights and gifts to bring to the church, can be as loyal or more loyal than the clergy, and should be included in responding to ecclesial abuses.” [176]

#### **EIGHT: THE MOST DANGEROUS MAN IN ENGLAND – THE CONVERT CARDINAL NEWMAN**

“Unlike many of his fellow converts such as Henry Edward Manning... Newman understood that the Catholic Church needed to balance its claim to institutional authority with an appreciation for the individual believer’s freedom of conscience.” [177]

“Some of Newman’s harshest words were reserved for the Ultramontane Catholics who made extravagant claims concerning papal authority, denounced the secular world, and refused to recognize Catholics who disagreed with them as members of the church.” [178]

“Newman presented his reform agenda as an apologetic against the attacks of Protestants.” [178]

“His efforts to champion the causes of doctrinal development, intellectual freedom, freedom of conscience, and the active role of the laity in the church were all framed using history, which had been the primary weapon of those who wished to deny the infallibility and even the credibility of the Catholic Church.” [179]

Newman located the church’s perfection “in the church as a whole as it moves to an ever-deeper understanding of the revelation it has received.” [179]

After Trent, “The Catholic Church became increasingly suspicious of the very idea of reform.” [179]

“... a collective corruption of memory” led to efforts to “eradicate all evidence of scandal from the church’s history.” [179]

“By a sleight of hand, the imperfect church militant or pilgrim church became the spotless bride.” (Church as “the fully realized kingdom of God on earth.” [179]

The papacy became the prime Tridentine agency of reform, beginning an identification of Catholic Church with Rome. [180]

While reform of diocesan and monastic life progressed, the notion of the church-as-a-whole or the papacy needed reform became highly suspect. [180]

E.g., Galileo: the pope was not to be questioned on any matter. [180]

French revolution cemented “the link between sedition and reform.” [180-181]

Catholic opposition to reform of mandatory tithing and church ownership of 10% of the land of France. Hierarchy was largely autocratic, making distrust of clergy easy to stir up. [181]

At the beginning, church was open to democracy; by 1790, it was adamantly opposed. [181]

By 1795: “All across the continent the church had been stripped of its property, monasteries and seminaries were closed, and clergymen had been imprisoned, exiled, or executed.” [181]

“... the church had been decimated and most of Italy lay in the hands of foreign powers.” [181]

Gregory XVI (1830s) opposed the Italian people’s desire for political liberties and the unification of Italy – “paranoia about democracy.” [181]

“Stretching papal revenues to their limits, he armed his supporters, filled the papal prisons, and exiled democrats.” [181]

He opposed anything “modern” including railroads and streetlights. [181]

1832: *Mirari vos* condemned the idea of freedom of conscience and the idea of the church being in need of reform. [181]

It was in this atmosphere that Newman became Catholic, even while writing his treatise on reform that implied claims that the church stands in need of reform. [182]

### **Development of Doctrine**

Newman’s “apologetic stance vis-à-vis the Protestants provided him with rhetorical cover for attempting to change Catholic positions on history and doctrine. » [182]

Since the magisterium was deeply suspicious of historical inquiry, Newman opened his essay arguing for the value of such inquiry. [182]

Newman claimed that “to be immersed in history is to cease to be Protestant.” [184]

The perfection of Christian ideas is not to be identified with unchanging doctrine, but rather in those ideas’ “ability to arrest and possess the mind.” [185]

While objective, they are also subjective in the sense that “they are apprehended by different people in different ways.” [185]

More powerful ideas are more multifaceted, extending “to many different aspects of life such as social, political, and moral concerns.” [185]

Christianity is able to adapt to new contexts without losing its identity. [185]

Seven tests for determining the legitimacy of development: “preservation of type, continuity of principles, power of assimilation, logical sequence, anticipation of its future, conservative action upon its past, and chronic vigor.” [185]

While attempting to demonstrate (*contra* Protestants) that Catholic developments – in ecclesiology, sacramentality, and devotions, e.g. – were legitimate, he also called all Catholics to think critically about doctrine. [186]

### **On Consulting the Faithful**

Publication of this essay in the last issue of *The Rambler* edited by Newman, led Msgr. George Talbot (close advisor of Pius IX) to designate Newman as “the most dangerous man in England,” and to argue that Newman’s spirit “must be crushed.” [187]

Newman argued that the magisterium is not subject to lay opinion, but that it would be foolish to proceed without knowing what such opinion is, as a matter of fact. [188]

Further, “the consensus of the faithful is a mark of the church’s infallibility.” [188]

There are many channels of tradition; the *consensus fidelium* is privileged among them. [188]

There was little foundation for declaration of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in doctrinal or theological tradition; it was “justified by the consensus of the faithful.” [188]

“In addition to providing evidence that a doctrine is apostolic he claimed that the consensus of the faithful was also a type of instinct in the bosom of the mystical body of Christ, a direction given by the Holy Spirit, an answer to prayer, and a jealousy of error manifested by a feeling of scandal.” [189]

He noted the 4<sup>th</sup> century fidelity of the laity, “in opposition to the majority of the hierarchy.” [189]

“... the laity played a pivotal role in the formation and reception of the Nicene Creed...” [189]

Newman warned that if the clergy cut the laity off from doctrinal study and simply required obedience, people would become indifferent and resort to superstition. [190]

Msgr. Talbot responded that the “province” of the laity was: “To hunt, to shoot, to entertain.” [190]

Because of suspicions aroused by this essay, Newman withdrew to a more monastic life. [190]

### **Freedom and Infallibility**

Discussion of infallibility heightened Protestant polemics in the 1860s and 1870s. [191]

*Apologia pro Vita Sua* was Newman’s response; its final chapter, though, was a response to both liberal and ultramontane Catholics. [191]

Fallen reason, he argues, needs an authority to restrain its recklessness – and Scripture serves as the means for conversion, but not as the authoritative restraint upon reason. [191]

The Church's infallibility was suited to preserving the knowledge of God. [191]

Newman argued that "these two realities, authority and private judgment, were held together in a type of dynamic tension in the Catholic Church. [192]

A very real, but also very limited, notion of infallibility. [193]

In his public letter to Gladstone, after Vatican I, Newman "declared that conscience is 'the aboriginal vicar of Christ.'" [194]

"... he hoped to show how conscience mitigated against an excessively authoritarian interpretation of the First Vatican Council." [194]

"Because conscience applies to things that should or should not be done and not to abstract doctrine, Newman concluded that papal infallibility cannot come into conflict with conscience." [195]

Newman outlined a type of examination on conscience in which one must engage prior to legitimate dissent. [195]

### **Newman's Legacy**

Restoration of the role of history: "By identifying the perfection of the church with its ability to adapt to new situations and contexts without losing its essential identity, Newman reinvigorated the idea that the church can make progress in its self-understanding and in its comprehension of divine revelation." [196]

Newman influenced Leo XIII, who promoted critical history, and thus opened the way for "a great recovery of medieval and patristic sources." [196]

## **EIGHT: DOROTHY DAY AND THE CATHOLIC WORKER MOVEMENT**

During the Depression, Day was scandalized by "the wealth of Manhattan Catholics" in contrast to the suffering of so many desperately poor. [199]

She noted that the Communists "were the only people willing to draw attention to the plight of the workers." [200]

"... a fear of Communism was paralyzing the church on social issues." [201]

### **Social Justice and the Papacy**

Economic conflicts fragmented members of the church. [201]

"... the extreme poverty and social dislocation caused by industrialization" led Leo XIII to address the issue of social justice. [202]

Leo's natural law argument posited a right to property and the rights of married couples to provide for their children as being prior to and independent of the state. [202]

He also insisted that "the state had a duty to provide for the poor and to ensure just wages and healthy working conditions." [202]

Leo "clearly tilted towards the concern of the urban poor." [203]

Labor is not truly free, as it is necessary, and therefore wage agreements cannot simply be regulated by market forces. [203]

This led Leo to support unions, and noted the analogy to medieval guilds. This support was seen as suspect by many Catholics. Thus, Pius XI reaffirmed the teaching in *Quadragesimo anno*. [204]

Pius focused on the common good as a principle governing the distribution of property. "... it is forbidden for one class to exclude another from sharing in the benefits of economic growth through industrialization." [205]

Labor must be considered in social as well as individual terms. [205]

Three principles of a just wage:

1. Sufficient to provide for themselves and their families, sufficient to enable the worker to improve his family's circumstances, sufficient to allow the worker to provide in some measure for his heirs;
2. Just wage must also take account of the condition of the employer;
3. Wages must be adjusted to the public economic good, manifested in full employment. [205-206]

Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin started the Catholic Worker one year after *Quadragesimo anno*. [206]

### **Genesis of the Catholic Worker Movement**

Maurin's program "was modeled on medieval reform movements and institutions." [207]

Action – the works of mercy – was as essential as communication in propagating the faith. [207]

"We should be announcers, not denouncers." [207]

### **The Early Years of the Catholic Worker Movement**

Day stressed personal responsibility over state responsibility. [211]

The Catholic Worker movement helped shift American Catholic attitudes toward labor. [213]

### **Dorothy Day and the Red Scare**

Dorothy Day often had to defend herself against charges of being a Communist. [215]

She was among the first to denounce Joseph McCarthy. [215]

She supported Castro's revolution in 1959. [215]

### **Conclusion**

"Day's advocacy of indiscriminate love and pacifism have also fallen out of favor." [216]

"Rather than embracing the personalist revolution, which began with the person as a subject rather than an object, our society treats the person as an object understood in economic terms." [216]

"Because market forces do not assign value to a person's relations with his or her family, role in the community, or spiritual gifts for the society, traditional cultures around the world have been disrupted.



The disruption of traditional cultures has, in turn, generated a host of fundamentalist movements that are responding with violence to the dehumanizing aspects of globalization.” [217]

## **CONCLUSION**

Six strategies of reformers’ response to opposition:

1. “They established their authority through their service to the church and its pastoral mission.” [218]
2. They “communicated their concerns and proposals clearly and persuasively to their audiences” – drawing on scriptural and traditional sources. [218]
3. Responded to adversaries “with mercy and charity,” and faced tribulation “with patience and fortitude.” [219]
4. They “emphasized the legitimacy of diversity within the unity of the church.” [219]
5. They “accepted that the church is comprised of flawed human beings,” dismissing romantic, idealistic notions. [219]
6. They “linked institutional, legal, organizational or social reforms to the conversion of hearts.” [219]

Traditionally, ‘fear of the Lord’ grounded a sense of accountability. Anderson judges that “the connection between fear of the Lord and accountability has largely been severed in current magisterial teaching” (cf. *Catechism* 879). [220]

“Fear of the Lord gave the reformers the courage to obey God rather than people, customs, laws, or institutions; and, at the same time, it kept them from making their ideas and agendas absolute.” [220]

Re: the sexual abuse crisis – the problem with institutional reforms is that bishops “have wide jurisdictional powers to dispense with canon law and to ignore review boards.” [221]

“In fact, there is nothing protecting dioceses from unworthy priests than the whims of the local bishop.” [221]

Priests’ complicity in the sexual abuse scandal also manifests problems of clerical accountability. [221]

So, too, lay accountability. Re: complicit laity – “their sin was to fear the bishops and not the Lord.” [222]

We should not lose sight of the real progress that has been made. “Over time, we have deepened our understanding of the meaning of conversion and how far it extends.” [223]