
Protestant Reformation

Part 7: Conclusion

As Narrated by Denver C. Snuffer, Jr.

The Protestant Reformation dramatically impacted the world. Even the target of the protest, Roman Catholicism, was improved by the rebellion. Unchallenged Catholic hegemony over political, economic and religious life in Europe led naturally and inevitably to abuse. When Protestants gave people a choice, it forced Catholicism to compete. An early result was the Catholic Counter Reformation.

Although the Counter Reformation also had abuses including the Spanish Inquisition, it also made needed reforms. Catholicism attempted a much-needed return to its spiritual foundation.

The Counter Reformation began with the Council of Trent in 1545 and lasted more than a century. Pope Paul III wanted the corruption of clergy, the sale of Indulgences and financial corruption in the church addressed. While much of Catholicism remained unreformed, the church addressed the long overdue and needed education and moral training of its clergy. Political appointments of bishops ended, and ecclesiastical discipline was improved. New religious orders were founded, dedicated to higher morality and better clerical service for local parishes.

One of the most important new religious orders was the Jesuits, founded in September 1540. Its founder, Ignatius of Loyola set out the laudable purposes, including: "...after a solemn vow of perpetual chastity, poverty and obedience, ... to strive especially for the defense and propagation of the faith and for the progress of souls in Christian life and doctrine, by means of public preaching, lectures and any other ministration whatsoever of the Word of God, and further by means of retreats, the education of children and unlettered persons in Christianity, and the spiritual consolation of Christ's faithful through hearing confessions and administering the other sacraments. ...ready to reconcile the estranged, compassionately assist and serve those who are in prisons or hospitals, and indeed, to perform any other works of

charity, according to what will seem expedient for the glory of God and the common good.” (Puca, Pasquale (30 January 2008). *St. Ignatius of Loyola and the Development of the Society of Jesus*, (*L'Osservatore Romano Weekly Edition in English*).

Once the Protestant movement began, its momentum carried beyond religion and into politics and economics. Rome lost control and Europe's nation-states independently considered their interests above the dictates of a Pope. The Protestant Reformation came only two decades after the Americas were discovered. Early colonialists in North America were largely Protestants. These Protestant refugees knew the terrible history of Roman hegemony. Those lessons inspired a political viewpoint that was incorporated into principles of the Constitution of the United States. The American government was directly influenced, indeed made possible by, the Protestant Reformation.

When the full measure of the Protestant Reformation is considered, the entire world was changed by what began with Martin Luther posting the 95 Theses. Like the stone cut out of a mountain without hands explained by Daniel interpreting King Nebuchadnezer's dream, it has grown to fill, and change, the whole world.

This year marks the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. We should look back in gratitude, and recover its energy by applying the virtue of God's word in our own lives.