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Review Article

Henry Outram Evennett, *The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation*. Notre Dame, Indiana:
University of Notre Dame Press, 1970

and

John Bossy, "The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Europe," *Past and
Present* 47 (May 1970): 51-70

by

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H. Outram Evennett was a cultured and precise speaker. A reader can divine this easily because his book, *The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation*, is a collection of six lectures he gave at Cambridge University in 1951, edited and postscripted by John Bossy. Along with an accompanying article from the journal *Past and Present*, Bossy's "The Counter-Reformation and the People of Catholic Europe," a reader can grasp the overall importance of and prime movers in the Counter-Reformation that had its beginnings with the Council of Trent. When one of these titles is used in the context of a classroom, the other should be assigned as well; they complement each other so closely that neither should be read without the other.

Evennett's thesis, stated briefly in the first lecture and more completely in the sixth, is two-part. First, he claims (and rightly so) that the Counter-Reformation was a powerful revival of religion that ensured the continuation of a form of Christianity that was subject to a single central authority. His second claim is that the methods of the Counter-Reformation reconstituted and reinvigorated Catholicism and set it upon its new course. (Evennett 21, 125) Bossy similarly attests that the Counter-Reformation was not so much about reinventing Catholicism but rather rediscovering and applying in new ways the doctrines behind it. For Bossy, this new application of doctrines directed at individual Christians instead of a collective Christianity as often as not resulted in failure. (Bossy 53, 62-3) Bossy's minor thesis, that Counter-Reformation Catholicism was directed more at individuals than the group, ties in nicely with a similar and prominent theme in

his 1985 book, *Christianity in the West*. The theme there, perhaps in its infancy in this 1970 article, is that after the Reformation and everything surrounding it, Christianity was no longer a system of beliefs (appealing to a collective Christianity) but a family of believers.

An important aspect of Evennett's lectures is that he viewed the Counter-Reformation as a deliberate and aggressive attempt by the Catholic Church to reassert itself in the lives of its parishioners. For Evennett, the Counter-Reformation was not merely a reaction to the Protestant Reformation but separate and true in its own right. (Evennett 3, 7-8) Bossy supports this aggressive concept of the nature of the Counter-Reformation with a discussion of the new powers of popes, cardinals, and bishops. The reformers at Trent were effective in doling out these new powers. (Bossy 52-3)

Bossy laments the passing of popular participation in Tridentine Catholicism, an aspect of pre-Reformation Christianity that, obviously, reformers found subversive or at least undesirable. He specifically mentions the passing of re-enactments of the washing of feet and a sort of mock Last Supper as celebrations of the end of Lent that were tacitly, if not explicitly, subdued. However, the loss of such popular participations, along with the suppression of parish wakes and fraternities, served to take the various streams of popular semi-religious practices and more tightly focus Catholicism into one stream of parochial methods. (Bossy 60-3)

The lack of central organization is the primary failure of the Counter-Reformation; this allowed not only abuses to continue for a while after Trent, but for new orders to take root. Even though the lack of central organization was a failure, the resulting development of orders such as the Society of Jesus was most definitely not a failure. According to Evennett, the Jesuits were perhaps the most important aspect of the Counter-Reformation. They represented a new kind of monk, an image of St Ignatius and supremely dedicated to good works. These new monks were intent on education and rooted in reality, prudence, and idealism. For the Jesuits, "action was prayer, and prayer led to action," a statement that simplifies Evennett's high place for the Jesuits. (Evennett 73-5, 78, 87)

Together, Evennett and Bossy establish the Counter-Reformation as a purposeful, aggressive, methodical, and pious attempt to batten the hatches of Catholicism in the face of an ever-widening Protestant movement. The combination of Evennett's book and Bossy's article give a reader an excellent introduction to the broad themes of the Counter-Reformation. Evennett especially delves a bit deeper into some aspects of the Counter-Reformation, most notably St Ignatius and the Jesuits. Bossy discusses some specifics, but the length constraints of a journal article necessarily prevent him from diving too deeply into detail.