The Counter-Reformation or Catholic Reformation and Roman Revival

Foreign Missions in the Roman Revival

Prayer
Scripture: Matthew 28:18-20
Hymn: 379 "From Greenland's Icy Mountains"

If Roman Catholicism could boast that it came out of the Reformation period numerically stronger than at the beginning, one of the most important factors was the tremendous burst of missionary activity that was one of the most distinctive marks of the Roman Revival. In fact Catholics can proudly boast that this missionary activity actually began before Luther's revolt. It was one manifestation of that great burst of human energy that also manifested itself in geographical exploration and colonization. Wherever the explorers went the missionaries went. Often the explorers were accompanied by missionaries. When colonies were planted or trading posts established, missionaries were in on the beginnings. While the different branches of Protestantism were moving from the initial period of religious enthusiasm into their scholastic periods—periods marked by attempts to formulate perfect creeds to express their view of orthodoxy, Roman Catholic missionaries were scattering throughout the newly discovered lands.

The older orders, especially the Franciscans, the Dominicans, and the Augustinians had already sent out many missionaries when the Jesuits arose. The Jesuits quickly moved to the front in missionary endeavor. The Jesuit emphasis on missions and their successes provoked the other orders to greater zeal. Sometimes the older orders were already established in the new areas when the Jesuits arrived—usually to quickly surpass them. Sometimes the Jesuits took up in fields where the other orders had failed or were floundering. When the Jesuits pioneered in new fields the other orders were not far behind—not only Augustinians, Franciscans, and Dominicans, but also the Theatines and the Capuchins. Jesuit methods and successes provoked great jealousy among the other orders and eventually intense rivalries and bitter criticisms. The Catholic kings and the Counter-Reformation popes took keen interest in the missionary work. Sometimes the mission work was actually hindered by bitter rivalries between kings and popes for control of missionaries and their fields. The successes and the problems moved Pope Gregory XV to found, in 1622, the "Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith" (Congregatio de Propaganda Fide) often shortened to just "Propaganda". The purpose was more effective supervision of missionary labors, to provide more and better trained missionaries, and to keep down rivalries between the different orders by assigning fields and handling complaints.

Preoccupation with creed making was only one reason for Protestantism being tardy in emphasizing missions. Too much of Protestantism was motivated by political and economic interests rather than by religious conviction and devotion. Some of Protestantism was motivated by sincere desire to follow and serve Jesus. Many joined Protestantism as a means to oppose the old order politically and economically more than religiously. Much of Protestantism was controlled by secular princes or state controlled. Protestantism was engrossed in establishing a place for itself in a part of the
world that had been dominated by the Catholics. Some Protestant leaders thought the end of the world was too near to get involved in missions. Some leaders, like Luther, felt the Great Commission was binding only on the apostles. Protestants were small enough in numbers that those qualified to be missionaries were too badly needed on the home front to think of foreign missions. Catholic missionary work was carried on by monks--Protestants did not have monks. Protestants were not in close contact with non-Christian peoples in foreign lands. Protestant countries were later in getting involved in the founding of colonies in foreign lands. As Catholics began to move into a scholastic period where concern for orthodoxy overshadowed missionary work, Protestants were awaking to the missionary challenge.

FRANCIS XAVIER, THE PIONEER JESUIT MISSIONARY (1506-1552):

The most famous of the Roman missionaries was Francis Xavier, one of the original followers of Ignatius of Loyola. He is remembered as "The Apostle of the Indies." In ten years he carried the message of Jesus to India, Ceylon, the East Indies, and Japan. He died trying to make his way into China. He ranks with the greatest missionaries of church history.

Francis Xavier was the youngest son of a Basque noble in the Spanish part of Navarre. In 1525 he matriculated at the University of Paris to spend eleven years preparing for service in the church. His roommate was the Savoyard, Peter Favre. He completed the philosophy course in 1530, receiving the Masters degree, and began lecturing on Aristotle. That fall he began the course in theology. Xavier and Favre became the first permanent disciples of Ignatius Loyola who had arrived at Paris in 1528. By 1533 Ignatius had won Xavier completely but it was not without a struggle--Ignatius described Xavier as the stiffest clay he ever molded. Xavier was one of the six companions of Ignatius who made the famous vows at Montmartre on August 15, 1534. On November 15, 1536, Xavier and his companions left Paris for Venice, where with great zeal he ministered in the hospitals. On June 24, 1537, he and Ignatius were ordained. The next year Xavier and the others met in Rome. In 1539 he participated in the conferences with the pope that led to the foundation of the Society of Jesus, and was its first secretary.

Early in 1540 King John III of Portugal sent a request to Pope Paul III for four missionaries to work in the immense colonial empire of the Portuguese in India and the East. The pope granted the request but reduced the number to two. Ignatius chose Rodrigues and Bobadilla. When Bobadilla became ill, Xavier was named to replace him. Two days later on March 6, 1540 the two set out for Portugal. In Lisbon, while waiting for transportation, they labored with such success that the king wanted to keep them in Portugal. Rodrigues stayed in Portugal to build up the church but Xavier, on his thirty-fifth birthday, April 7, 1541, sailed away from Lisbon, with two helpers. The pope had appointed him Apostolic Nuncio.

The voyage was a difficult one with many becoming seriously ill. Xavier unstintingly ministered to his fellow-passengers, giving up his own room for the sick. The ship wintered in Mozambique where Xavier became ill. When the ship sailed again he left his two helpers to care for the sick and to be missionaries there. The ship touched at Socotra and Xavier found Nestorian Christians who had not received baptism. He baptized a number of them. Later he sent
missionaries to the island.

Xavier reached Goa in India, the capital of the Portuguese Indian Empire on May 6, 1542. He found Augustinians, Dominicans, and Franciscans already at work. He presented himself to the bishop, the Franciscan Juan de Albuquerque, and offered himself as a collaborator. He found the work of the church in sad and discouraging condition. Most of the Portuguese were little credit to Christianity. Xavier took to the streets daily, ringing a little bell. Children, workmen, and slaves gathered about him. He led them to the church to give them instruction in Christian doctrine. For five months he devoted himself to the Portuguese and their servants in Goa. He sought to raise the level of Christian living. He recruited members for his Society and founded a college to train missionaries. He sent back to Europe for helpers.

In October, 1542, he went to the southern tip of the peninsula to work among the Paravas of the Fishery coast. Many had been baptized to secure Portuguese protection against the Moslems who were also making their way into India. For two years he worked among these people who had had very little Christian instruction. He taught, baptized, built churches, settled disputes, and organized defense against enemies. He mastered the vernacular well enough to translate the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. He also prepared a catechism in the vernacular and some prayers. He traveled to a number of places in Southern India preaching and baptizing. In December, 1544, he baptized ten thousand fisher folk in Macua in the neighbouring kingdom of Travancore, complaining that his arm became lame and that he lost his voice baptizing so many.

In 1545 he was in Cochin, San Thome near Madras, and on the island of Ceylon. By September he had reached Malacca where he tried to revive the faith of the Portuguese. He planned work in the Spice Islands. On January 1, 1546 Xavier sailed for Amboina where he spent the spring. He spent the summer at Ternate. He went on to Halmahera and Morotai. In May, 1547 he left the Moluccas and returned to Malacca. At Malacca he met Hachiro and two other Japanese. From them he learned something of the ancient culture of Japan and that the Portuguese had established trade relations. Xavier set his heart on evangelizing the Japanese.

Xavier with the three Japanese returned to Goa, visiting Ceylon, Cochin and the Fishery coast on the way. He founded a missionary college in Cochin. He had to settle problems and strengthen the college in Goa.

In 1549, Xavier, the three Japanese and two other Jesuits set out on the long hazardous voyage to Japan, landing at Kagoshima, on August 15, 1549. He was the first Christian missionary to Japan. He was received in a friendly manner and began making converts. Working in Japan for about two years and four months, he penetrated almost all the little kingdoms into which Japan was divided, baptizing some two thousand. He preached in Hirado, Kyoto, the capital, Yamaguchi, and Bungo. Most of his converts were of the lower classes; in Yamaguchi some of his converts were of the military caste.

On the way to Japan the ship had touched at Canton. In Japan he found that the Japanese highly esteemed the Chinese culture. He began making plans to try to enter China which he had learned was closed to Foreigners.
Xavier, leaving Japan, November 20, 1551, returned to Goa to check on his earlier work and to prepare for the China mission. At Malacca he learned that Ignatius Loyola as general of the Jesuits had separated India and the East from the Provincial of Portugal because of the strong resentment the Portuguese had raised against themselves by their unchristian behavior throughout the East. Xavier, himself, had been appointed Provincial of the Indies. He found all his earlier works struggling against great difficulties but able to make progress. He had to reorganize the College at Goa, with a view to producing native priests for the missions.

Xavier had learned much from experience that he tried to pass on to his fellow workers. He had learned the importance of learning the native language, of studying the religions and customs of the peoples, of creating a literature in their vernacular, of carefully organizing the mission and providing adequate workers.

In April, 1552, he was finally able to start for China with an embassy to the Emperor of China, hoping to negotiate a trade alliance between China and Portugal. At Malacca the Portuguese Commandant Zlvoz de Ataide refused to allow the embassy as an infringement on his rights and Xavier had to proceed alone. He landed on the island of Sancian (Shang Ch'uan) off the coast of Canton in the last days of August, 1552. For three months he tried in vain to secure passage to the mainland but it was still closed to foreigners. Toward the end of November, 1552, Xavier fell ill, dying on December 3, 1552. He was canonized in 1622.

Francis Xavier's story furnished great inspiration to the rapidly growing missionary outreach to all the newly discovered lands. Jesuit work in India continued to grow. One of the most interesting of the Jesuit missions was to the court of the Great Mogul, Akbar, ruler of the growing Moslem Empire penetrating India from the northwest. Akbar wanting to end strife between Moslems and Hindus in his kingdom requested a mission from the college in Goa, after learning about the college from a priest, Julian Pereira. Three Jesuits led by Aquaviva went to his court in 1579 and stayed until 1583. A second mission was requested by Akbar in 1590. A third headed by Jerome Xavier, a nephew of Francis Xavier, was requested in 1590. The Jesuits won many friends, prepared considerable literature but their converts were few because of growing Moslem hostility that followed the death of Akbar.

ROBERT DE' NOBILI:

One of the ablest and most original of the Jesuit missionaries in India was Robert de' Nobili. Nobili was born to a noble Italian family in 1577, a nephew of Bellarmin, the Jesuit theologian and Cardinal, and was related to Pope Julius III. He joined the Jesuits in 1597 and at his own request was sent to India in 1605. He worked on the Fisher Coast, and then at Madura. He observed that the converts were almost all low caste. Becoming a Christian was looked on as becoming a Portuguese—the Portuguese were despised. Nobili wanted to reach Brahmins, the ruling caste. Within a year he mastered Tamil, Telugu, and Sanscrit. He cut himself off from his fellow missionaries, obtaining solitary quarters in the Brahmin quarters. He began to dress like the Hindu ascetics, known as saniassy, introducing himself as a Roman nobleman (raja) who admired Indian philosophy and who had come to Madura to practise penance, to
pray, and to study sacred law. He hired a Brahmin teacher and
studied the Sanscrit classics until he gained a better knowledge
of the Vedas than most of the Brahmins. For a long time he remained
shut up in his dwelling, after the custom of Indian penitents,
living on rice, milk, and herbs with water, eating only once a day.
He practised the customary frequent bathings. He aroused consider-
able curiosity. At first he denied admittance to all visitors.
Gradually he began to receive visitors who were charmed by his use
of the Tamil language, by his strict Hindu etiquette, and by his
quotations from the classical literature. He had made a very careful
study of the Hindu religion to find parallels to Christian doctrine.
He was the first known European to read and master the Sanskrit
originals. Taking Paul as his model he tried to become a Hindu
to the Hindus.

Soon Nobili was making converts among the Brahmins. He
instructed them to give up all superstition and idolatrous worship,
but allowed them to continue their national customs in political
and civil usages. He allowed them to keep the appropriate dress of
their caste. They kept the tuft of hair of a Brahmin. They anointed
their foreheads with sandalwood paste. They kept the cord slung
over the shoulder—he had them attach a cross to it.

His fellow missionaries, led by Fernandes, who worked among
the lower classes, perhaps out of envy and perhaps out of fear and
misunderstanding, sent an unfavorable report to Rome that Nobili
was allowing his converts to continue heathen customs. Nobili was
able to satisfy the Archbishop of Cranganore and the chief Inquisitor
of Goa. He sent an explanation to Rome. Cardinal Bellarmine sent
him a strong rebuke. Finally he was able to satisfy Cardinal
Bellarmine and the General of his Society. Pope Gregory XV finally
decided the matter in his favor, adding that the native customs
could continue until the pope ruled otherwise.

Nobili began to extend his work beyond Madura, slowly reaching
into all of Southern India. He taught his converts not to despise
their Christian brothers in the lower castes. Other Jesuits joined
him in his work. Nobili prepared a catechism in four books in Tamil.
He prepared two smaller catechisms. He wrote a number of hymns.
He wrote a number of works in Tamil such as "A Treatise on the Eternal
He translated several of these into Telugu. He introduced Christian
terms into these languages.

Nobili aroused fierce opposition from Hindu teachers but his
work continued to grow. In 1646, exhausted by forty-two years of
toil and suffering, almost blind he had to retire to Jaffnapatam in
Ceylon and then to Mylapore, where he died on January 16, 1656.

The work was continued by a number of able Jesuits until in
1703 French Capuchins who had begun work in India, sent accusations
to Rome against Jesuit methods. Pope Clement XI sent Tournon to
investigate. After spending some eight months in India Tournon
condemned the Jesuit methods and forbade the missionaries to continue
the practices initiated by Nobili. On January 7, 1706, Pope
Clement XI declared that the missionaries were bound to respect the
decrees. The condemned Jesuit missionary methods and practices
came to be known as the Malabar Rites.

The decline of Portugal and the condemnation of the Jesuit methods
were a severe blow to the work in India. Hindu opposition grew.
MATTEO RICCI:

The founder of Chinese missions was Matteo Ricci, born at Macerata in the Papal States, October 6, 1552. After completing the classical studies in his home town, on August 15, 1571, he entered the Society of Jesus at the Roman College. After completing the philosophical and theological courses, he studied mathematics, cosmology, and astronomy, under Christopher Clavius. In 1577 he asked to be sent to Farthest Asia. He arrived at Goa on September 13, 1578. He taught there as at Cochin. In 1582, Alessandro Valignani, who had been his master in Rome and who was master of all the Jesuit missions in India, charged him to prepare to enter China. Since the time of Xavier, Jesuits, Augustinians, Franciscans, and Dominicans had all tried to enter China. After very short stays all had been forced to leave by hostility. Valignani ordered Michele de Ruggieri and Ricci to master Mandarin Chinese, the language of the officials and the educated. When Valignani was satisfied that they had mastered the Mandarin he ordered them to seek entrance. They were to tell the mandarins who questioned them "that they were religious who had left their country in the distant West because of the renown of the good government of China, where they desired to remain till their death, serving God, the Lord of Heaven." They were permitted to settle in Chao-k'ing, the administrative capital of Canton. They placed in conspicuous places in their house pictures of the Virgin with the Infant Jesus. When visitors inquired about the picture they gave them their first ideas of Christianity. They sought to arouse Chinese curiosity by large and small clocks, mathematical and astronomical instruments, prisms, musical instruments, oil paintings and prints, cosmographical, geographical and architectural works with diagrams, maps, and views of towns and buildings, and large, splendidly bound books. The Chinese who had assumed that all outside China were barbarians were astounded. Rumors spread concerning the little museum of the missionaries. The Chinese were intrigued by the map of the world—quite different from their own with China as the big country, and all the rest of the countries of which they had heard not as large as one of the fifteen Chinese provinces. The missionaries explained the map. The governor requested a copy.

Ricci studied the Chinese writings and gathered everything favorable to Christianity. His quotations from their own writings greatly pleased the Chinese. Ricci translated The Ten Commandments into Chinese and circulated copies as the moral code of Christians. It was appreciated by the Chinese. Ricci then prepared a small catechism containing the chief points of Christian doctrine in Chinese. The work was well received. Many copies were distributed.

Ruggieri died in Europe in 1588 on a mission to interest the pope in China. Ricci was expelled from Chao-k'ing in 1589 when the viceroy of Canton decided he wanted the missionaries' house—Ricci had as an assistant a young pupil. Ricci's reputation prepared a warm reception in Shao-chow, also in the Canton province. Ricci began to dress like the Chinese and dispensed with an interpreter. In 1595 he failed in an attempt to settle in Nan-king, capital of South China. He settled in Nan-ch'ang, capital Kiang-si, famous for the number and learning of its educated men. In 1598 he tried to gain entrance to Peking but was forced to return to Nan-king. He worked with great success. On May 18, 1600 Ricci set out again
for Peking. He was finally permitted to enter by the Emperor Wan-li on January 24, 1601. For nine years he worked at Peking. He gained the emperor's good will by gifts of European curiosities, especially his map of the world. The Chinese took great interest in his mathematics and astronomy. His use of science made a great impression on the educated Chinese. He began to compose in Chinese little moral treatises that were very much appreciated by those who held public office. One of these the Chinese called "The Twenty-five Words." Another called "Paradoxes" presented striking passages from Scripture and Christian philosophers.

His most influential work was his "T'ine-chu-she-i" (The True Doctrine of God). It covered the existence and unity of God, creation, immortality, rewards and punishment in a future life. Ricci supported these with the best arguments from reason while refuting the worship of idols and transmigration. He drew numerous proofs from Chinese books. Before the author's death it was reprinted at least four times and twice by the pagans.

Ricci also prepared guides for new converts. He trained fellow-workers and sent them out, instructing them to adapt their message to the special conditions where they worked and to avoid all unnecessary attacks on traditional customs and habits. Ricci used the Chinese terms "T'ien" (heaven) and "Shang-ti" (Sovereign Lord) to designate God. He spoke of the God of Christians as "T'ien chu" (Lord of Heaven). Educated Confucianists recognized that he had drawn these terms from their books. Ricci explained that the God he preached was the true God who is sovereign lord of spirits and men who knows all that takes place in the world, the source of all power and all lawful authority, the supreme regulator and defender of the moral law, rewarding those who observe the moral law and punishing those who violate it. Ricci allowed his converts to honor their ancestors and deceased parents with the traditional prostrations and sacrifices. To the Chinese to neglect these marked one as an unworthy member of family and nation. Ricci considered it important and no offense to the Christian religion to observe national civil ceremonies and customs. He allowed the customary ceremonies in honor of Confucius without which no scholar could get a degree. He allowed his converts to express thanks for Confucius, his excellent teachings and his books. He warned his pupils against superstition and idolatry.

Ricci died at Peking, May 11, 1610, highly honored by the Chinese. Missionaries he had trained continued to follow his methods for fifty years with great success.

When the Dominicans began a mission in China in 1631, they were alarmed at the methods of the Jesuits. They sent a denunciation to Pope Urgan VIII. One of the Jesuits, Moralez, went to Rome to press the case. The Jesuits defended their work. In 1651 Martin Martini was sent to China to investigate Jesuit practices. His report led Pope Alexander VII, on March 23, 1656, to give approval to the work of the Jesuits. The case was reopened when the Franciscans entered complaints against the Jesuits. This time the report of Navarrete led to Rome forbidding the missionaries to use the terms drawn from Confucius and to allow converts to continue the Chinese customs of honoring Confucius and the ancestors. Clement XI sent Tournon to make further investigation. The Pope's mandate of January 15, 1707, required all missionaries to discontinue the questioned practices under threat of excommunication.
When the Emperor and the educated Chinese learned of the pope's actions they became very bitter against the Christians. The emperor was unbinding that no one would receive a degree from a Chinese university without the usual ceremonies. A number of missionaries were expelled. The controversy was very damaging to the Chinese mission because of the growing hostility.

SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE WORK IN THE AMERICAS:

Missionaries from all the leading orders spread out over the Americas. The Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith worked to keep down the bitter rivalries. Missionaries often worked to protect the rights of the natives and strongly protested the exploitation that characterized the colonial empires. To Protestant missionaries who arrived later it often seemed that the natives were kept ignorant and in subservient positions. Protestants charged that Jesuit methods resulted in Catholics taking over pagan festivals and assigning them to Catholic saints, continuing the old rites. The Protestants found the Catholics strongly entrenched in South and Central America, in Canada, along the Mississippi and Great Lakes, in Florida and California. The missionary expansion was one of the greatest triumphs of the Roman Revival.