International Symposia on Jesuit Studies 4, no. 1 (2026): Article 2

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Special Issue: *Renovatio Mundi: The Jesuits as Educators in History*
Part II

Teaching the Faith in a Hostile Environment: The Jesuit Challenge in Elizabethan England

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ABSTRACT

In the age of the Reformations, most of northern Europe had become Protestant and hostile territory regarding Catholic evangelization and institutions. Therefore, without the venues of churches and schools, how could the Elizabethan Jesuits (re)evangelize and educate the English people? There were a range of covert ministries that Jesuits engaged in, with various degrees of success. Catechesis played a particularly significant role, whether instruction of the young, those with little religious background, or the more advanced, using such aids as the catechisms of Peter Canisius and other Catholic authors. The dissemination of printed and manuscript devotional works also touched many minds and hearts. Chief among these were the Bible (especially the Douai-Rheims English translation), *The Imitation of Christ*, and Robert Persons's *Christian Directory*, as well as numerous other works of prose and poetry, not least those of Robert Southwell. These collectively impacted not only Catholics but the wider literary and spiritual culture.

Keywords:
Elizabethan Jesuits; preaching; catechesis; catechisms; Spiritual Exercises; publishing; the Bible; Imitation of Christ; Christian Directory

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DOI: 10.51238/ISJS.2024.02
Published: 30 October 2026
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One of the seminal ways in which the Jesuits had a major impact on the religious and intellectual culture of Europe and the early modern world was through their schools. The Jesuit colleges, which spread at a remarkable rate across much of Europe and beyond, were centers of both learning and faith that significantly influenced not only the students within but the wider world as well.[1] In the wake of the Reformation, however, most of northern Europe had become Protestant and, for the most part, hostile territory regarding Catholic evangelization and institutions, as had increasingly become the case in Elizabethan England. Yet despite the serious difficulties and dangers, a Catholic mission of seminary priests from continental Europe commenced in 1574, reinforced by the inauguration of the Jesuit mission in 1580. However, a fundamental problem confronted the Catholic evangelizers. Without the venues of churches, schools, and other public institutions and apostolates, with neither pulpit nor classroom generally available, how could they (re)evangelize and educate the English people, whether they were committed or wavering Catholics, or others potentially open to the Catholic faith?

Catechesis and Catechisms

There were a range of ministries, often necessarily covert, that English Jesuits and others engaged in, with catechesis playing a significant role. In fact, during the Reformation both Catholics and Protestants made extensive use of catechisms to instruct individuals and groups, both children and adults, in the basics of the faith. Yet, as one of many examples of greater links between the late medieval and Reformation eras than earlier historiography generally recognized, the fifteenth century had already witnessed a new concern for the religious instruction of the faithful. Still, with the onset of the Reformation, catechesis underwent some significant changes, including greater organization and dissemination, as well as a transition from oral to predominantly printed formats, and a shift from adults to a greater focus on the instruction of children.[2]

1 See Luce Giard, "The Jesuit College: A Center for Knowledge, Art, and Faith, 1548–1773," trans. Brian van Hove, S.J., *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 40, no. 1 (2008): 1–31. See also Paul F. Grendler, *Jesuit Schools and Universities in Europe, 1548–1773* (Brill, 2019); John W. O'Malley, S.J., "Jesuit Schools and the Humanities Yesterday and Today," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 47, no. 1 (2015): 1–34. O'Malley points out that most of the colleges "did not teach theology, regarded as a professional discipline," but rather "an hour or so of catechism per week, supplemented by sermons and similar services," all directed toward "a lived appreciation of [faith] and its values" (24–25).

2 Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300–1600* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 333–62, 425–29; John W. O'Malley,

On the Protestant side, both Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–64) produced catechisms. Luther, in 1529, wrote both a Greater or Large Catechism, a scholarly and polemical version primarily for pastors, and the simpler but very influential Small Catechism, which followed a question-and-answer format and taught the basics of the faith. Calvin's major catechetical work, *The Catechism of the Church of Geneva, that is, a Plan for Instructing Children in the Doctrine of Christ*, was published in both French (1542) and Latin (1545).[3] For religious minorities, catechisms could prove particularly useful in that they could be taught or read surreptitiously, as was the case, in one prominent example, with the French Huguenots.[4] However, the other side in these religious struggles engaged in their own active means of evangelization, and in France a leading Catholic spokesman was the Jesuit Émond Auger (1530–91). As a gifted preacher and writer/controversialist, including his influential *Catechism* (1563), Auger became known as "the French Chrysostom" and "the French Canisius."[5]

More broadly in the Catholic world, both in Europe and in the expanding overseas missions, catechisms—along with other genres—became a vital means of religious instruction, specifying how the faith was, or should be, taught. This was one of many examples of the interplay of tradition and innovation in early modern Catholicism, with its links to the apostolic, patristic, and medieval church but also employing new conceptual language and frameworks designed to reach much wider audiences.[6] Among its decrees, the Council of Trent (1545–63) called for the production of "a catechism, which the bishops shall have faithfully translated into the language of the people and explained to the people by all parish priests." Along with other

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The First Jesuits (Harvard University Press, 1993), 115–26; Nicholas Terpstra, *Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World: An Alternative History of the Reformation* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 248–55.

3 See Mark A. Noll, ed., *Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation* (Baker Book House, 1991); Henry Eyster Jacobs, trans. and ed., *The Large Catechism of Martin Luther* (United Lutheran Publication Society, 2018). Luther's other catechism, *The Small Catechism for the Simple Pastor and Preacher*, was usually known as the Small Catechism.

4 Raymond A. Mentzer, "The Printed Catechism and Religious Instruction in the French Reformed Churches," in *Books Have Their Own Destiny*, ed. Robin B. Barnes, Robert A. Kolb, and Paula L. Presley (Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1998), 93–101.

5 See A. Lynn Martin, *The Jesuit Mind: The Mentality of an Elite in Early Modern France* (Cornell University Press, 1988), 70–71, 99–100.

6 Ulrich L. Lehner, ed., *Innovation in Early Modern Catholicism* (Routledge, 2022), esp. Lehner, "Introduction: Innovation and Creativity in Early Modern Catholicism," and "The Rhetoric of Innovation and Constancy in Early Modern Catholicism," 1–8 and 9–27 respectively.

instructions, the council fathers concluded, "let them strive to engraft these things on the hearts of all and instruct them in the law of the Lord."[7] The importance of this project is made clear by the fact that the clergy, from bishops to priests, were to be actively involved, as well as the mandate to translate the catechism into the vernacular languages so as to be understood by the average person, and, as an animating directive, "to engraft these things on the hearts of all." In 1566, the Roman Catechism appeared, the church's first universal catechism, though it evidently operated primarily as a doctrinal manual for parish priests.[8] How much "engrafting" occurred is not clear.[9] In any event, this catechism and many others as well (several of which will be discussed below) were produced and translated into numerous vernaculars and adapted to various cultures—across much of Europe and the world—and often proved to be valuable tools of evangelization.[10]

For Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) and the early Jesuits, in sync with the impetus of the contemporary church, catechesis and catechisms became important means of evangelization.[11] Ignatius's fellow Jesuit and first biographer, Pedro de Ribadeneira (1526–1611), highlighted the importance of this practice going back to apostolic times: "At the very beginning of the emerging

7 H. J. Schroeder, O.P., trans., *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (Tan Books, 1978), 197–98. See also John W. O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013).

8 The church's second universal catechism appeared in 1992: the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

9 Robert I. Bradley, *The Roman Catechism in the Catechetical Tradition of the Church* (University Press of America, 1990).

10 Antje Flüchter and Rouven Wirbser, eds., *Translating Catechisms, Translating Cultures: The Expansion of Catholicism in the Early Modern World* (Brill, 2017); Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, *A Companion to Early Modern Catholic Global Missions* (Brill, 2018). Another type of catechism that developed in the aftermath of the Council of Trent was the military catechism; see Vincenzo Lavenia, "Conscience and Catholic Discipline of War: Sins and Crimes," *Journal of Early Modern History* 18, no. 5 (2014): 447–71.

11 Claudio Ferlan, *The Jesuits: A Thematic History* (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2023), 83–84. With regard to Jesuit missions, see Ana Carolina Hosne, "The Craftsmanship of Jesuit Catechisms in Peru and in China," in *The Jesuit Missions to China and Peru, 1570–1610: Expectations and Appraisals of Expansionism* (Routledge, 2013), 107–44; and Hung T. Pham, S.J., "Composing a Sacred Space: A Lesson from the *Cathechismus* of Alexandre de Rhodes," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 46, no. 2 (2014): 1–34, which focuses on catechesis and inculturation in seventeenth-century Vietnam. Music also served as a valuable means of catechesis. In the Americas, for example, "European music was used to enhance the catechesis of the indigenous populations"; T. Frank Kennedy, S.J., "Music and the Jesuit Mission in the New World," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 39, no. 3 (2007): 1–24, here 16.

Church, men distinguished and superior in their lives for virtue and learning were chosen to teach people catechism and the rudiments of our faith."[12] With regard to Ignatius, among his numerous responsibilities and projects during his tenure in Rome as superior general (1541–56), he "focused his energies on the establishment of a Roman institution suitable for receiving and supporting catechumens. Making great efforts, he finally accomplished this."[13] Moreover, Ignatius clearly realized the value of catechisms, as seen for example in a letter and instruction he sent to Peter Canisius (1521–97) in 1554, the year prior to Canisius producing the first of his three influential catechisms (as discussed below). According to Ignatius:

> It will [. . .] help if young people are everywhere taught by their instructors some catechism or manual of Christian doctrine; it should contain a summary of Catholic teaching which children and uneducated people can have in their hands. [. . .] It will also help to furnish poorly educated but intelligent curates and pastors with a manual instructing them what they need to present to the people to ensure that they will welcome or reject what ought to be welcomed or rejected.[14]

The importance of catechesis was made manifest in the emergent Society by the fact that, among other vows, Jesuits were directed to show "special care for the instruction of children, according to the manner of living contained in the apostolic letters of the Society of Jesus and in its Constitutions." According to a further explanation:

> The promise to instruct children and uneducated persons in conformity with the apostolic letters and the Constitutions does not induce a greater obligation than the other spiritual exercises by which the neighbor is aided. [. . .] But the promise about the children is placed in the vow so that this holy practice may be held as something more especially enjoined and may be exercised with greater devotion, in view of the special service thereby given to God our Lord in aid of [. . .] souls.[15]

To reaffirm the importance of catechesis among the major ministries of the Society, the First General Congregation (1558) framed the (rhetorical) question: "Is it to be enjoined upon the professed that they themselves ful-

12 Pedro de Ribadeneira, S.J., *The Life of Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. Claude Pavur, S.J. (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2014), 261, no. 367.

13 Ribadeneira, *Life of Ignatius*, 171–72, no. 243.

14 Ignatius to Canisius, Rome, August 13, 1554, in *Ignatius of Loyola: Letters and Instructions*, ed. Martin E. Palmer, S.J., John W. Padberg, S.J., and John L. McCarthy, S.J. (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2006), 503.

15 John W. Padberg, S.J., gen. ed., *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms* (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), 202, 204, nos. 527, 528.

fill, from time to time, their vow to undertake the catechizing of children?" The answer was axiomatic: "This pious work is much commended to the professed, who should practice it according to the mind of the apostolic letters and the Constitutions. In fact, our father Ignatius enjoined upon each of the professed that they engage in it once for forty days."[16] Thus, while the importance of catechesis (and catechisms) was not in doubt, this ministry, like many others, would prove far easier to conduct in Catholic or neutral regions, or areas in flux, as opposed to countries or missions quite hostile to Catholicism.[17]

England, while in many ways connected to and influenced by the broader currents of the European Reformations, was undergoing its own series of see-saw religious transformations during the tumultuous reigns of the Tudors.[18] Over the long term, the ascendant Protestant regimes of church and state used various means to ensure the privileged status of the Protestant Church of England, including a proliferation of catechisms and other texts.[19] On their part, and perhaps even more so than many subjugated religious minorities elsewhere, English Catholics made good use of catechisms, often in vernacular versions of some of the more effective works produced by co-religionists on the Continent.

Chief among these were the famous catechisms of the Dutch Jesuit Canisius, which were proving so effective elsewhere, especially in the Holy Roman Empire, the region of his own apostolic focus. In 1555, Canisius issued his massive *Summa doctrinae christianae* (Summary of Christian doctrine), a manual directed toward a more educated audience, and which, in the dynamic between the two essentials of piety and truth, privileged *pietas* over *veritas*, whereas the Roman Catechism subordinated *pietas* to

16 John W. Padberg, S.J., Martin D. O'Keefe, S.J., and John L. McCarthy, S.J., eds., *For Matters of Greater Moment: The First Thirty Jesuit General Congregations* (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1994), 102, decree 138.

17 See Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540–1770*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2005), especially his discussion and differentiation of areas characterized as the "triumphant," "militant," and "martyred" church, generally referencing southern, middle, and northern Europe respectively, 43–95.

18 Among the more influential revisionist accounts, see Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Clarendon Press, 1993); Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580*, 2nd ed. (Yale University Press, 2005). For an insightful post-revisionist study, see Peter Marshall, *Heretics and Believers: A History of the English Reformation* (Yale University Press, 2017).

19 Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England, c.1530–1740* (Clarendon Press, 1996). See also Eugene R. Kintgen, *Reading in Tudor England* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), especially "Reading in a Religious Setting," 99–139.

veritas.[20] Yet, in the evolving context of the times, it was in essence both a Catholic Reform and Counter-Reformation publication, both pedagogical and polemical, in that its question-and-answer format had brief, instructive responses on topics not disputed by Protestants but also in-depth answers on controversial theological issues, such as salvation (soteriology) and the proper role of the Christian and Catholic tradition in the formation of religious belief and practice. In line with the Jesuit *modus operandi* of adaptation and accommodation, in the Holy Roman Empire Canisius's original Latin text was translated into German, and two modified versions were issued: a *Catechismus minimus* (Shorter catechism [1556]), especially for children, and a *Parvus catechismus catholicorum* (Catholic catechism [1558]), a version geared to secondary schools.[21]

Another Jesuit also renowned for his intellect and spirituality, Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621), published his own famous catechism in 1598, *A Brief Christian Doctrine to Be Learned by Heart*, which, by being concise and clear, was well suited for memorization. This work was so successful and popular among catechists that it ended up being translated into sixty-two languages.[22] Other of Bellarmine's writings also had an im-

20 It is important to point out that *pietas* and *veritas* were certainly not seen to be in opposition; rather it was a question of degree and emphasis in which these two goods should ideally enrich and reinforce each other. As an example, while serving as prefect of studies at the English College in Rome, Robert Southwell wrote to Superior General Claudio Acquaviva (1543–1615, in office 1581–1615) concerning the *modus operandi* of that important institution: "First, since careful instruction of students in letters [a version of *veritas*] and piety is the principal task of this college, I think that I can generally say that there are more grounds for thanking God for progress made in both than for attending to correction" (January 23, 1585); Thomas M. McCoog, "The Letters of Robert Southwell, S.J.," in *"And Touching Our Society": Fashioning Jesuit Identity in Elizabethan England* (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2013), 146–50, here 149.

21 Thomas Flowers, S.J., *The Reform of Christian Doctrine in the Catechisms of Peter Canisius* (Brill, 2023); Paul Begheyn, "The Catechism (1555) of Peter Canisius, the Most Published Book by a Dutch Author in History," *Quaerendo* 36 (2006): 51–84; Patrizio Foresta, "*Un catechismo per li todeschi*: Per un'archeologia della *Summa doctrinae christianae*," in *Diego Laínez (1512–1565) and His Generalate*, ed. Paul Oberholzer, S.J. (Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2015), 689–716; O'Malley, *First Jesuits*, 123–24; Joseph N. Tylenda, S.J., *Jesuit Saints and Martyrs* (Loyola University Press, 1984), 117–20, especially 118. See also Claudio Ferlan, "The Expansion of the Society of Jesus in German-Speaking Lands," in *The Acquaviva Project: Claudio Acquaviva's Generalate (1581–1615) and the Emergence of Modern Catholicism*, ed. Pierre-Antoine Fabre and Flavio Rurale (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2017), 171–90, especially 174–78, which stresses Canisius's role in promoting the importance of both catechisms and colleges.

22 Tylenda, *Jesuit Saints and Martyrs*, 337–40, especially 338.

pact, at times quite profoundly, as was the case in England with Edward Cottington (1581–1602), who was from a Somerset Protestant family, and whose youthful reading included John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*.[23] At Oxford, however, Cottington read several of Bellarmine's works, and these, in combination with other writings, convinced him to become a Catholic and, soon thereafter, a lay brother in the Society of Jesus.[24]

However, with regard to continental and specifically Jesuit catechetical literature in England, Canisius's catechisms, evidently better suited to northern European audiences, had a significantly greater impact. More broadly, across Britain and Ireland, Canisius's catechisms, as well as others, were translated and adapted for English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish audiences, with the design of strengthening Catholics in their faith and winning over as many others as possible.[25] These catechisms were clearly designed for both pastoral and educational purposes, and they reached a wide audience. As an example, among other Catholic works, Rhosier Smyth (Roger Smith) translated part of Canisius's catechism into Welsh in 1609, and its evident success was followed by a second edition in 1611.[26]

An example of a homegrown catechism was the work of Laurence Vaux (1519–85), a Catholic cleric from Lancashire, who, seeing the need for a very basic presentation of the faith, produced a helpful work with the somewhat unfortunate title *A Catechism of Christian Doctrine, Necessary for Children and Ignorant People* (Louvain, 1567). His description of the church left no doubt about the link between its apostolic origins and its papal leadership: "The Church is a visible community of people, first gathered together of Christ and his disciples, continued unto this day in a perpetual succession, in one Apostolic faith, living under Christ the head: and in earth, under his Vicar, Pastor and chief Bishop."[27] Vaux's *Catechism* evidently reached a wide audience, especially in the roughly fifty years after its production, going through eight printings between 1568 and 1620.[28]

23 On this opus's enormous importance, see Elizabeth Evenden and Thomas S. Freeman, *Religion and the Book in Early Modern England: The Making of Foxe's "Book of Martyrs"* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

24 Henry Foley, S.J., *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus* (London, 1878), 4:408–10.

25 Alexandra Walsham, "Wholesome Milk and Strong Meat: Peter Canisius's Catechisms and the Conversion of Protestant Britain," British Catholic History 32, no. 3 (2015): 293–314.

26 J. Gwynfor Jones, *Early Modern Wales, c. 1525–1640* (St. Martin's Press, 1994), 141.

27 Philip Caraman, ed., *The Other Face: Catholic Life under Elizabeth I* (Longmans, 1960), 170–72, here 170.

28 Alan Dures and Francis Young, *English Catholicism, 1558–1642*, 2nd ed. (Routledge, 2022), 60–61.

It is also interesting to note that an Englishman abroad, the Jesuit Thomas Stephens (1549–1619), produced a catechism for the incipient Catholic mission in India. Stephens arrived in Goa in 1579 and spent the last forty years of his life devoted to implanting Christianity in southern India. In the Jesuit tradition of scholarship in service of faith, he produced a Konkani grammar, the first ever published in an Indian language. That was a prelude to his Konkani catechism, a way of reaching the indigenous population in their own language and, as reasonably as possible, by means of their own culture. This was very much in the spirit of the catechetical directives of the Council of Trent and in the Jesuit spirit of accommodating the faith—within the bounds of orthodoxy—to other peoples and cultures, including, as appropriate, textual accommodation.[29]

Devotional Works: Prose

In addition to the genre of catechisms, with their educational as well as pastoral focus, many other books fed the spiritual and intellectual hunger of English Catholics.[30] In fact, due in part to its proscription, especially from the public sphere, English Catholicism increasingly became, and has been aptly described as, "a religion of the book."[31] T. A. [Thomas Anthony] Birrell actually goes much further in his analysis: "There is no longer any excuse for treating English Catholic book culture as something narrowly

29 William V. Bangert, S.J., *A History of the Society of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1986), 150; Dures and Young, *English Catholicism*, 51.

30 See A. F. [Antony Francis] Allison and D. [David] M. Rogers, *The Contemporary Printed Literature of the English Counter-Reformation between 1558 and 1640*, 2 vols. (Ashgate, 1989 and 1994); A. C. Southern, *Elizabethan Recusant Prose, 1559–1582* (Sands, 1950).

31 Alexandra Walsham, "'Domme Preachers'? Post-Reformation English Catholicism and the Culture of Print," *Past and Present* 168 (2000): 72–123, here 122. See also Susannah Brietz Monta and Salvador Ryan, "Catholic Written Cultures," in *The Oxford History of British and Irish Catholicism*, vol. 1, *Endings and New Beginnings, 1530–1640* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 260–79; Jaime Goodrich, "Printed Translations and Catholic Reformation," in *Oxford History of British and Irish Catholicism*, 1:280–97; Victor Houliston, "Recusant Literary Culture in England and Wales," in *A Companion to Catholicism and Recusancy in Britain and Ireland: From Reformation to Emancipation*, ed. Robert E. Scully, S.J. with Angela Ellis (Brill, 2022), 507–34. For a wider, continental perspective, see Justyna Kiliańczyk-Zieba and Magdalena Komorowska, eds., *Early Modern Catholicism and the Printed Book: Agents—Networks—Responses* (Brill, 2024). An instructive example is how the Jesuit Diego de Ledesma's (1519–75) catechism had an impact in Poland; see Miroslawa Hanusiewicz and Robert Aleksander Maryks, "The Earliest Polish Translation of a Jesuit Catechism," in Kiliańczyk-Zieba and Komorowska, *Early Modern Catholicism and the Printed Book*, 275–87.

parochial: it was part of the mainstream of European literary culture in the broadest sense."[32] It had become increasingly clear that Protestants as well as Catholics, in England and across much of Europe, had resorted to a wide range of English Catholic writings, and not only Catholic spiritual classics. At the same time, in Catholic and, especially, Protestant versions, these works were often edited, including excisions and additions.[33]

Of greatest importance, the Bible held pride of place. In a very insightful article, "Vernacular Bible Reading in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe: The 'Catholic' Position Revisited," Wim François corrects the widely held but mistaken view that vernacular Bible reading by the laity was all but prohibited by the Catholic Church, especially in the midst and aftermath of the animosities and divisions stoked by the Reformation. Rather, François concludes, "the spread of vernacular editions in the wake of the Reformation was not met with a general prohibition on all vernacular Bibles, but by a selective prohibition of Reformation-minded editions, while at the same time being countered by the production of 'good' Catholic editions."[34] The situation varied considerably depending on time and place, but there was some availability of the Bible in the vernacular for many English (the Douai–Rheims Bible) and other Catholics.[35]

A telling example is that of Margaret Clitherow (ca. 1556–86), who came to be known as the saint from the Shambles in York, and who, in addition to being a wife and mother, was also in many ways an evangelist. With regard to her own spiritual sustenance, in an account of Clitherow's life and impact, her spiritual director, John Mush (1552–1617), wrote: "When she had leisure, she most delighted to read the New Testament of [the] Rheims Translation, Kempis of the *Following of Christ* [discussed below], [. . .] and such like spiritual books."[36] So, too, Philip Howard, earl

32 T. A. Birrell, "English Counter-Reformation Book Culture," in *Aspects of Recusant History*, ed. Jos Blom, Frans Korsten, and Frans Blom (Routledge, 2021), 189–98, here 192. See also Birrell, "William Carter (c.1549–84): Recusant Printer, Publisher, Binder, Stationer, Scribe—and Martyr," in Blom, Korsten, and Blom, *Aspects of Recusant History*, 204–25.

33 See, for example, Chelsea Reutcke, "A Coordinated Catholic Press: The Editing and Dispersal of Nicholas Sander's *Schismatis Anglicani*," in Kiliańczyk-Zieba and Komorowska, *Early Modern Catholicism and the Printed Book*, 52–74.

34 Wim François, "Vernacular Bible Reading," *Catholic Historical Review* 104, no. 1 (2018): 23–56, here 54.

35 For English Catholics, the Douai–Rheims Bible was a translation from the Latin Vulgate into English by members of the English College, Douai. The New Testament was published in one volume at Rheims in 1582; the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) was published in two volumes by the University of Douai in 1609 and 1610.

36 John Mush, *Life of Margaret Clitherow*, in Caraman, *Other Face*, 176. For more on Clitherow, see Bar Convent Archives, vol. 8-C; Mush, "A True Report of the

of Arundel (1557–95), who, after his conversion to Catholicism, spent the last ten years of his life imprisoned in the Tower, received great comfort through readings from the early church fathers and, especially, the Bible:

> He used to read the [. . .] works of St. Jerome and other ancient fathers; as also old historiographers, particularly Eusebius, in which, as he signified unto Fr. Southwell, he found exceeding comfort for the confirmation of his faith by beholding there how the Church was in her infancy. Upon Sundays and feasts he used to read some part of the holy scriptures with special reverence and humility.[37]

Given the widespread geographical, cultural, and religious variations, minority and persecuted Catholics in places such as England were more likely to depend on and draw comfort from the Bible and other spiritual writings than co-religionists in Catholic countries and some overseas missions. The latter, by way of contrast, had access not only to these but to a far greater array of religious opportunities and nourishments, such as a greater availability of the sacraments, as well as being immersed in a broader Catholic culture, or, in the case of some missions beyond Europe, a localized Catholic environment, with a supportive range of arts and architecture, in addition to religious literature.[38]

The late medieval spiritual classic *Imitatio Christi* (The imitation of Christ), ascribed (most likely correctly) to Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471), grew out of the robust contemporary spirituality of the Devotio Moderna. It remained immensely popular throughout the early modern era and, except for the Bible, probably became the most widely read devotional work in the Western spiritual tradition. Among others, it had a profound impact on the spiritual life of Ignatius of Loyola, and, through him, on Jesuit spirituality. According to his biographer, Ribadeneira, Ignatius made

> frequent use of Thomas a Kempis's [. . .] *On the Imitation of Christ*, and he always strongly approved of its use as reading material. He so imbibed the spirit and the teaching of that book, he so eagerly took it to heart, and so perfectly embodied it in himself that (in the opinion of many) Ignatius's life was a kind

Life and Martyrdom of Mrs. Margaret Clitherow," in *The Troubles of Our Catholic Fathers Related by Themselves*, ed. John Morris (London, 1877), 3:331–440. See also, more broadly, Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and the Reformations: A Global History* (Yale University Press, 2024).

37 "The Life and Death of Philip Howard," in Caraman, *Other Face*, 168–69.

38 See Hsia, *World of Catholic Renewal*, especially 159–86. See also Kateřina Horníčková and Michal Šroněk, eds., *Jesuit Art and Czech Lands, 1556–1729: Missionizing through the Arts* (Lexington Books, 2023); Rinald D'Souza and Anthony da Silva, eds., *The Jesuits, Goa and the Arts* (Xavier Centre of Historical Research, 2023).

> of full-bodied, striking, living image of all the precepts that are contained in that precious book.[39]

It is clear, for example, that, among other sources, *The Imitation of Christ* influenced Ignatius's classic contribution to the spiritual life and its seminal literature: *The Spiritual Exercises*.[40]

An important study of the *Imitatio* argues that by the mid-sixteenth century, English and French translations reflected "a conscious effort to address a lay readership."[41] This classic, along with others, played an important role in deepening the faith of some and helping to bring about the conversion of others. As referenced above, in addition to the New Testament, Clitherow was most "delighted to read" *The Imitation of Christ*.[42] Edward Walpole (1560–1637), who was raised as a Calvinist, was influenced by his cousin, the Jesuit Henry Walpole (1558–95), by means of conversations, letters, and books, to embrace the Catholic faith and thereafter to become a Jesuit. With regard to the spiritual writings that deeply affected Edward, "the most important of these were the *Confessions* of St. Augustine and Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ*." Edward went overseas, where he entered the Jesuits, received his formation, and was ordained. He finally returned home and worked for his last forty years on the English mission.[43]

In fact, both Catholics and Protestants drew from the deep spiritual well of the *Imitatio*, since its inherent Christocentricity and biblicism had universal appeal. However, in most Protestant versions there were excisions, especially the fourth book, centered on the Mass and the Blessed Sacrament. For Catholics, on the other hand, the first three books—on the importance of cultivating a rich interior spiritual life and inward consola-

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39 Ribadeneira, *Life of Ignatius*, 51.

40 See Terence O'Reilly, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Contexts, Sources, Reception* (Brill, 2020). See also Pierre-Antoine Fabre, "The Writings of Ignatius of Loyola as Seminal Text," in *A Companion to Ignatius of Loyola: Life, Writings, Spirituality, Influence*, ed. Robert Aleksander Maryks (Brill, 2014), 103–22; Moshe Sluhovsky, "Loyola's Spiritual Exercises and the Modern Self," in Maryks, *Companion to Ignatius of Loyola*, 216–31.

41 Maximilian von Habsburg, *Catholic and Protestant Translations of the* Imitatio Christi, *1425–1650: From Late Medieval Classic to Early Modern Bestseller* (Ashgate, 2011), 77.

42 Caraman, *Other Face*, 176. It is interesting to note that, like Clitherow's two favorite books, when Ignatius was superior general of the Society, he "had only two books permanently on his desk, the New Testament and the *Imitatio*"; von Habsburg, *Catholic and Protestant Translations of the* Imitatio Christi, 200.

43 Francis Edwards, S.J., ed. and trans., *The Elizabethan Jesuits:* Historia Missionis Anglicanae Societatis Jesu *(1660) of Henry More* (Phillimore, 1981), 254–57, here 256; 273–76.

tion—were balanced and reinforced by the importance of communal life and worship, centered on the Eucharist, as detailed in the fourth book.[44] Some have been surprised that the *Imitatio*, with its strong focus on the inner spiritual life and contemplation, had such an influence on Ignatius and the Jesuits, with their shift from a monastic to a much more activist model for their religious order and its apostolic outreach. But Ignatius's goal and ideal was that a Jesuit should be a "contemplative in action," combining interiority with an active apostolate in the world. He saw no contradiction between these two poles but rather a connective vitality linking the spiritual and the apostolic life, the individual and the community. He and his Jesuit brothers evidently saw that link in *The Imitation of Christ*—between individual spirituality and its communal manifestation in receiving and then ministering to the Body of Christ. Thus, as Maximilian von Habsburg perceptively concludes: "The persistence of the *Imitatio* as a bestseller in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries owes a considerable amount to the Jesuit adoption of the text."[45]

With regard to the writings of the English Jesuits, their most prolific author was Robert Persons (1546–1610), who was forced to leave England in 1581, after only a year at work on the mission, but that exile enabled him, amid many other activities, to embark on an extensive ministry of the written word. Among his many writings, the most influential was undoubtedly *The Christian Directory: The First Booke of the Christian Exercise, Appertayning to Resolution* (1582).[46] This spiritual masterwork, commonly known as *The Book of Resolution*, became "a phenomenal best-seller" from the start and was "probably the most popular devotional work to appear in English before 1650," going through, in its several iterations, some forty editions in that period.[47] A contemporary assessment by a fellow Jesuit, Henry More (1586–1661), indicates why *The Christian Directory* had such a wide impact:

> All was clearly set out [. . .] in an appropriate style calculated to persuade. It is not easy to describe the eagerness with which it was received, the spiritual profit with which it was devoured, and [. . .] how much it has been read by

44 Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (Penguin Books, 1952).

45 Von Habsburg, *Catholic and Protestant Translations of the* Imitatio Christi, 245.

46 Robert Persons, *Christian Directory*, ed. Victor Houliston (Brill, 1998). For the broader background, see Houliston, *Catholic Resistance in Elizabethan England: Robert Persons's Jesuit Polemic, 1580–1610* (Ashgate, 2007); Francis Edwards, *Robert Persons: The Biography of an Elizabethan, 1546–1610* (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1995).

47 Persons, *Christian Directory*, xi.

> every sort of person of both sexes. [. . .] Although it is only here and there that he touches on a very few questions that are controversial, he shows in the clearest possible light what Christian life ought to be. [. . .] Indeed, if Persons had done nothing else in his whole life, by this one work he would have earned immortality from his countrymen, and the reputation of a man who did more by his single-handed labour than a whole company.[48]

It is especially telling that this treatise of devotion and Christian living was, as More noted, "read by every sort of person of both sexes." Even allowing for some hyperbole, this suggests that not just the nobility and gentry but people of various classes, and significant numbers of women as well as men, read this and perhaps other related spiritual books. Among the individuals most affected by *The Christian Directory* was Thomas Pennant (1579–1638?), who, through its influence, became a Catholic and a Jesuit. As Pennant himself wrote:

> The principal means leading to my conversion [from Protestantism] was Father Robert Parson's Book of Resolutions, and to him, under God, I must ascribe my conversion to the Catholic faith; for having read his book, I resolved to abandon the vanities of the world, and four days after I left London for St. Omer's, and thence determined to proceed to Rome to consult the author of that book as to the mode of life in which to serve God.[49]

After entering the Society, Pennant was ordained in 1608 and, upon completion of his studies in Rome, returned home and spent the remainder of his days laboring on the Jesuit mission in England and Wales.[50]

There is also the case of Philip May, who was a servant to Lord Chamberlain Hunsdon. Upon King James's accession to the English throne (r. 1603–25), May, contrary to the official stance, suggested that James might be lenient or even favorable to Catholics. Upon that basis and suspicion, according to the Jesuit William Weston (1550–1615), who was at that time a prisoner in the Tower, the council

> sent to arrest him [May], and on laying hold of him they opened a box of his at the same time and found a certain book of Father Persons, called *The Directory*, but in the version corrupted by a heretic. Straightway the man was dragged off to the Tower of London and lodged immediately below my cell.[51]

48 Edwards, *Elizabethan Jesuits*, 140.

49 Foley, *Records of the English Province*, 4:519–20.

50 Foley, *Records of the English Province*, 4:520.

51 William Weston, *The Autobiography of an Elizabethan*, trans. Philip Caraman (Longmans, 1955), 225–26.

Upon learning that a Jesuit (Weston) was in the cell just above him, May stated: "I have never set eyes on a priest in my life. However, as soon as I get out of here, the first thing I shall do will be to search out one of them and speak with him."[52] Thus, in addition to Catholics who were more deeply confirmed in their faith by reading works by fellow Catholics, such as Persons, May's example was apparently one of many in which individuals were drawn to the Catholic faith through their reading of Catholic literature, sometimes only or primarily available in Protestant editions.

These cases, especially regarding *The Christian Directory*, help to explain the comments of one of the more charismatic of the Elizabethan Jesuits, John Gerard (1564–1637). He called Persons's *Christian Directory* "a most useful and wonderful book which I believe has converted more souls to God than it contains pages. Even the Protestants appreciated it very much as you can see from the recent edition brought out by one of their clergymen, who tried to steal credit for it."[53] This "recent edition" was "the version corrupted by a heretic" that Weston referenced above. The Calvinist cleric in question was Edmund Bunny (1540–1618), who "purged" Persons's treatise of its Catholic framework and published a Protestantized version in 1584: *A Booke of Christian Exercise, Appertaining to Resolution*. In reaction and response to Bunny, the following year Persons issued a revised edition, and Bunny replied with *A Briefe Answer* in 1589. In any event, there is no doubt that Persons's work became a spiritual classic, which taught and strengthened many in the Catholic community and won over some Protestants as well. At the same time, ironically, Protestant adaptations, which were able to circulate without restrictions, may have influenced a number of (wavering) Catholics/church papists as well as some Protestants/Puritans to warm to the Church of England as a supposed "via media."[54]

52 Weston, *Autobiography of an Elizabethan*, 226, 232nn18–20.

53 John Gerard, *The Autobiography of a Hunted Priest*, trans. Philip Caraman (Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1952), 2.

54 Robert E. Scully, S.J., *Into the Lion's Den: The Jesuit Mission in Elizabethan England and Wales, 1580–1603* (Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2011), 220–23. See also Victor Houliston, "Why Robert Persons Would Not Be Pacified: Edmund Bunny's Theft of *The Book of Resolution*," in *The Reckoned Expense: Edmund Campion and the Early English Jesuits*, ed. Thomas M. McCoog, S.J., 2nd ed. (Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2007), 209–32; James F. Keenan, S.J., "Unexpected Consequences: A Jesuit and Puritan Book, Robert Persons's *Christian Directory*, and Its Relevance for Jesuit Spirituality Today," *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 33, no. 2 (2001): 1–26. As another example of the reach of this book, in the case of the redoubtable Bess of Hardwick: "Well read as she was in the book of life, [. . .] spent nothing on books," owning only about half a dozen. Yet among these few was the *Christian Directory*, though in a Protestant version; A. L. [Alfred Leslie] Rowse, "Bess of Hardwick: Builder and Dynast," in *Eminent Elizabethans* (University of Georgia

With regard to the circulation of books in England, as elsewhere in early modern Europe, both church and state tried to censor or ban writings that they deemed harmful, whether heretical or treasonous. Especially in times of great tension, as occurred not infrequently during the Elizabethan regime, the door to some degree of religious toleration, often only slightly ajar, was slammed shut. As examples, in 1569 and 1570, in the midst of the Northern Rebellion of the Catholic earls and the related papal excommunication of Queen Elizabeth (r. 1558–1603),[55] the government issued proclamations banning what it deemed to be seditious books and papal bulls, followed by a similar pattern in the 1580s with the commencement of the Jesuit mission to England, the Anglo-Spanish War (1585–1604), and, especially, fears concerning the Spanish Armada (1588).[56] Yet, in response, a "veritable industry of publishing English Catholic books on the Continent sprang up," sponsored by William (Cardinal) Allen (1532–94), Persons, and others, designed to circumvent the authorities and flood England with Catholic writings. Persons himself managed to send more than eight hundred books there.[57] On a parallel track, in England, the Jesuits set up several secret printing presses, but it was often difficult to stay many paces ahead of the determined efforts of the pursuivants and spy networks.[58]

Other surprising centers for the circulation of Catholic and other allegedly subversive writings were prisons, which often housed numbers of

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Press, 1983), 1–40, here 32. Cf. Nicole LaBouff, "An Unlikely Christian Humanist: How Bess of Hardwick (ca. 1527–1608) Answered 'The Woman Question,'" *Sixteenth Century Journal* 47, no. 4 (2016): 847–82.

55 See Aislinn Muller, *The Excommunication of Elizabeth I: Faith, Politics, and Resistance in Post-Reformation England, 1570–1603* (Brill, 2020).

56 See, for example, "Prohibiting Seditious Books in Matters of Religion" (March 1, 1569), "Ordering Arrest for Circulating Seditious Books and Bulls" (July 1, 1570), and "Ordering Discovery of Persons Bringing in Seditious Books and Writings" (November 14, 1570), in *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, vol. 2, *The Later Tudors (1553–1587)*, ed. Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin (Yale University Press, 1969), 312–13, 341–43, 347–48, respectively; see also "Ordering Martial Law against Possessors of Papal Bulls, Books, Pamphlets" (July 1, 1588), in *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, vol. 3, *The Later Tudors (1588–1603)*, ed. Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin (Yale University Press, 1969), 13–17.

57 A. L. Rowse, "Father Parsons the Jesuit," in *Eminent Elizabethans*, 41–74, here 54. With more of a focus on the continental Catholic diaspora and the importance of national identity, see Christopher Highley, *Catholics Writing the Nation in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

58 Patrick H. Martin, *Elizabethan Espionage: Plotters and Spies in the Struggle between Catholicism and the Crown* (McFarland, 2016); Mark Rankin, "Richard Topcliffe and the Book Culture of the Elizabethan Catholic Underground," *Renaissance Quarterly* 72 (2019): 492–536.

Catholic detainees, both priests and laypersons. As we have learned regarding the permeability of convents and other early modern locales and spaces,[59] prisons were also often far more permeable than imagined, and prisoners found various ways of producing and sending out their own writings, as well as receiving books in prison, whether from individuals or by means of various Catholic networks.[60] An influential example of such an intervention was Robert Southwell's (1561–95) *Epistle of Comfort* (1587), which he wrote to strengthen the resolve of the recent Catholic convert Philip Howard, earl of Arundel, who spent the last decade of his life in the Tower, dying there for his faith in 1595. Yet, as with Southwell's "Epistle to His Father," his *Epistle of Comfort* to Howard influenced far more than the earl, touching the lives of many Catholics and others, well into the future.[61]

Although Howard's noble status gave him some unique privileges, many other Catholics detained for their faith also built up collections of spiritual writings within prison walls, as did many Catholic households throughout the country. This was confirmed in government raids on prisons and private homes in the late sixteenth century, often resulting in the confiscation of large amounts of English and continental Catholic manuscripts and printed materials. As Alexandra Walsham and Earle Havens

59 See, for example, regarding convents, Elizabeth A. Lehfeldt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain: The Permeable Cloister* (Routledge, 2005). With a specific focus on English Catholics, see Peter Davidson, "Recusant Catholic Spaces in Early Modern England," in *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Ronald Corthell et al. (University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 19–51.

60 See Ruth Ahnert, *The Rise of Prison Literature in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2013); William Sherman and William Sheils, eds., *Prison Writings in Early Modern England* (University of California Press, 2009). On the importance of networks and letter-writing, see Earle Havens and Elizabeth Patton, "Underground Networks, Prisons, and the Circulation of Counter-Reformation Books in Elizabethan England," in *Early Modern English Catholicism: Identity, Memory and Counter-Reformation*, ed. James E. Kelly and Susan Royal (Brill, 2017), 165–88; Lindsay O'Neill, *The Opened Letter: Networking in the Early Modern British World* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015). See also Aislinn Muller, "Catholics and the Underground Devotional Market in Post-Reformation England," in *Religion and the Early Modern British Marketplace*, ed. Kristin M. S. Bezio and Scott Oldenburg (Routledge, 2022), 76–99.

61 See Scott R. Pilarz, S.J., *Robert Southwell and the Mission of Literature, 1561–1595: Writing Reconciliation* (Ashgate, 2004); with specific regard to these two epistles, see Pilarz, *Robert Southwell and the Mission of Literature*, 1–40 and 41–79, respectively. See also Christopher Devlin, *The Life of Robert Southwell: Poet and Martyr* (Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1956); Robert E. Scully, S.J., "'He may be a father to the soul that is a son to the body: Robert Southwell (1561–95) and Divided Family Loyalties in the English and Catholic Reformations," *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 9, no. 4 (2022): 511–29.

aptly describe it: "Post-Reformation English Catholicism was," almost by necessity, "a religious culture of the book."[62] Government officials seized many Catholic books collected by those imprisoned, including from the Fleet Prison (1582) and Winchester Jail (1583), as well as books in the possession of Gatehouse and Newgate Catholic clerical prisoners who were transferred to Wisbech Castle (1615). Many additional books were seized in raids on Catholic households in the counties of Derbyshire, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Gloucestershire, and Middlesex between 1584 and 1586. The lists of these seizures include forty-one Catholic recusants, men and women, and indicate the extensive range of books that English Catholics managed to obtain, despite government bans and censorship.[63] Among the books listed in *Private Libraries in Renaissance England* that have been discussed above are the following: innumerable copies of the Bible, especially the New Testament; several of Canisius's catechisms, as well as those of the Council of Trent and Vaux; Kempis's works, especially the *Imitation of Christ*; Persons's *Christian Directory*; and a range of others.[64]

Devotional Works: Poetry

In addition to prose, poetry also touched the hearts and minds of many English Catholics. Here, one such writer will be highlighted—Robert Southwell—who spoke especially to the persecuted Catholic community, but to many non-Catholics as well, through his gifts of language and spiritual inspiration. Through briefer gems, of which "The Burning Babe" is perhaps the finest example, and longer poems, including "Saint Peters Complaynt," Southwell propounded fundamental Catholic beliefs, and especially encouraged his co-religionists in the heartfelt practice of their faith.[65] In "The Burning Babe," Southwell employs and interposes imagery of Christ's birth and passion, as can be seen in excerpts from this iconic poem:

> A pretty babe all burninge bright did in the ayre appeare
> Who scorched with excessive heate such floodes of teares did shedd

62 Alexandra Walsham and Earle Havens, "Catholic Libraries: An Introduction," in *Private Libraries in Renaissance England, Volume VIII: A Collection and Catalogue of Tudor and Early Stuart Book-Lists PLRE 167–260*, ed. R. [Robert] J. Fehrenbach and Joseph L. Black (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2014), 129–56, here 129.

63 "Inventories of Books Owned by Roman Catholics in England: 1582–1615," in Fehrenbach and Black, *Private Libraries in Renaissance England*, 157–261.

64 "Inventories of Books Owned by Roman Catholics in England," 157–261.

65 See Joseph D. Scallon, *The Poetry of Robert Southwell, S.J.* (Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1975), which argues that Southwell's literary activities were inextricably connected to his vocation as a Jesuit and missionary priest in England.

> As though his floodes should quench his flames, which with his teares were fedd
> Alas quoth he but newly borne in fiery heates I frye
> Yet none approach to warme their hartes or feele my fire but I
> My faultles brest the furnace is the fuell woundinge thornes
> Love is the fire and sighs the smoke the ashes shame and scornes
> The fewell Justice layeth on and Mercy blowes the coales
> The metall in this furnace wrought are mens defiled soules
> For which as nowe on fire I am to worke them to their good
> So will I melt into a bath to washe them in my bloode.[66]

In this brief but intensely rich poem, Southwell combines an amazing array of imagery: birth, baptism, sin, suffering, passion, death, and redemption. The joy of Christmas is tempered by the tragedy of passion and death but rekindled by the abiding hope of redemption. The Christ Child undergoes great suffering for sinful humanity, but his burning love will conquer all. Birth leads through suffering and death to resurrection. Though brief, this poem does not lend itself to easy interpretation; yet it says a great deal that Southwell's gifted contemporary, Ben Jonson (1572–1637), said that he would have willingly destroyed many of his own poems to have written this one instead.[67] The depth of the poem is captured in F. W. [Frank Walsh] Brownlow's suggestion that, in "The Burning Babe," the nativity prefigures not only the passion of Christ but the martyrdom of the disciples as well.[68] This message would have powerfully resonated with the Catholic recusant community, which was undergoing its own wrenching experience of persecution and martyrdom. But through it all, hope remained: God's grace and forgiveness are made manifest in and through this Babe, burning with the fire of Divine Love.[69]

"Saint Peters Complaynt" is another of Southwell's more famous poems and is also his longest at 132 stanzas.[70] While it is not as lauded as "The Burning Babe," it has several elements that, while universal in nature, spoke directly to and aimed to reinforce the convictions and connectivity of the English Catholic community, particularly, as here, regarding the proper spiritual role of the cult of the saints, including the central figure of Peter—and, implicitly through him, the central role of the papacy. As Southwell says in the opening lines of "The Author to the Reader":

66 Robert Southwell, S.J., *Collected Poems*, ed. Peter Davidson and Anne Sweeney (Carcanet, 2007), 14.

67 Devlin, *Life of Robert Southwell*, 186, 267.

68 Brownlow, *Robert Southwell* (Prentice Hall International, 1996), 119–21.

69 See Theresa M. Kenney, "The Christ Child on Fire: Southwell's Mighty Babe," *English Literary Renaissance* 43, no. 3 (2013): 415–45; Pilarz, *Robert Southwell and the Mission of Literature*, 253.

70 Southwell, *Collected Poems*, 63–85.

Deare eye that daynest to let fall a looke,
Of these sad memories of Peters plaints:
Muse not to see some mud in cleerest brooke,
They once were brittle mould that now are Saints.
Theyr weakenes is no warrant to offend,
Learne by their faults, what in thine owne to mend.[71]

It is not surprising that Southwell, like other Catholic writers and artists, focused on Saint Peter at a time when the papacy was under attack from Protestants. Yet, Southwell does not flinch from probing either Peter's denial of Christ or the consequences of that betrayal, including the apostle's profound remorse as he pours out his soul and confronts his sinfulness and unworthiness, especially as supposed shepherd of the church. As he laments:

Titles I make untruths, am I a rocke?
That with so softe a gale was over-throwne?
Am I fit Pastor for the faithfull flocke,
To guide theyr soules, that murdred thus mine owne?
A rock of ruine, not a rest to stay,
A Pastor, not to feed, but to betray.[72]

Southwell is not, of course, questioning the Catholic belief in the papacy as a divinely ordained institution but rather is positing that the church rests not on a human foundation, whether Peter or any of the individual or collective line of popes, but fundamentally on a divine one—Christ himself—who would continue to guide and safeguard the church and its central role in salvation history. Southwell also suggests that the saints are models of conversion. In Peter's "complaynt," after his remorse and copious tears, the poem comes to a close with the apostle's anticipation and embrace of forgiveness and redemption:

With mildenesse, *Jesu*, measure my offence:
Let true remorse thy due revenge abate:
Let teares appease when trespasse doth incense:
Let pittie temper thy deserved hate.
Let grace forgive, let love forget my fall:
With feare I crave, with hope I humbly call.[73]

In other words, the grace of conversion is available to all: sinners can truly become saints. Southwell was assuring his audience, especially the

71 Southwell, *Collected Poems*, 63.
72 Southwell, *Collected Poems*, 68.
73 Southwell, *Collected Poems*, 85.

English Catholic community and those who may have fallen away, that, like Peter, despite backsliding or wrongdoing, even apostasy or betrayal, they too could be forgiven and lovingly received back into the fold.[74] These interconnected themes of sin and conversion, which form the core of the First Week of the Spiritual Exercises, appear in a number of Southwell's other poems and writings, as well as in the works of other contemporary Catholic authors, and were a leitmotif of the Jesuit mission.[75]

Nancy Pollard Brown's poignant conclusion regarding Southwell and the written word serves well as an epitaph for many Jesuits and other Catholic writers in early modern England:

> In his care to revise texts, and to control, as far as he could, their distribution among the faithful, Southwell foresaw the way in which his work was to extend beyond his death. His immediate aims to serve his family and his friends became immersed in the need to have written texts to guide and strengthen Catholic life.[76]

Yet, over the long term, the circulation of numerous published as well as manuscript catechetical and devotional writings, prose as well as poetry, impacted not only English Catholics but the wider literary and spiritual culture, in which the written word—designed to transform both the intellect and the heart—was disseminated and promoted in service of *the Word*.

74 See Gary Kuchar, "Alchemy, Repentance, and Recusant Allegory in Robert Southwell's *Saint Peter's Complaint*," in *Redrawing the Map of Early Modern English Catholicism*, ed. Lowell Gallagher (University of Toronto Press, 2012), 159–84.

75 For an overview of Southwell's writings, see Allison and Rogers, *Contemporary Printed Literature of the English Counter-Reformation*, 2:142–44, nos. 714–725.5. See also Nancy Pollard Brown, "Robert Southwell: The Mission of the Written Word," in McCoog, *Reckoned Expense*, 251–75.

76 Brown, "Robert Southwell," 274. See also Anne Sweeney, *Robert Southwell: Snow in Arcadia; Redrawing the English Literary Landscape, 1586–95* (Manchester University Press, 2006); Sweeney, "Afterword: Deciphering Southwell," in Southwell, *Collected Poems*, 121–44. On the broader and long-term religious stage, see Alexandra Walsham, *Generations: Age, Anxiety, and Memory in the English Reformations* (Oxford University Press, 2023).