

GUY BEDOUELLE

*The Reform of Catholicism, 1480–1620*

Guy Bedouelle's *Reform of Catholicism, 1480–1620*, introduces nuances to earlier books on this subject by demonstrating how reform within the Roman Church owed much to a ferment and coordination of action emanating from its traditional geographic and jurisdictional centre, Rome. But, after showing how the Council of Trent legislated reform in the Church and empowered structures to carry it out, Bedouelle also highlights the actions of dedicated men and women that brought about a renewed spirit in the Church and in society – a “Catholicism” which, at least in some aspects, paralleled the way other Christians constituted a “Lutheranism,” a “Calvinism,” or an “Anglicanism.”

It is a long time since I have read a book in which the objectives are so clearly set out and concisely met. ... Within the space of just a few hours the reader has been provided with an impressively cogent *tour d'horizon* which has simply no rivals in what is now an increasingly crowded field. ... [It is] an excellent introduction to early modern Catholicism for undergraduates from departments of History, Theology, or Religious Studies [and] also plugs an important gap in the market for the interested layman.

—SIMON DITCHFIELD, *University of York*

**CATHOLIC AND RECUSANT TEXTS OF  
THE LATE MEDIEVAL  
& EARLY MODERN PERIODS**

Edited by

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The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies acknowledges the generous assistance of JOSEPH and CLAUDINE POPE in the publication of Catholic and Recusant Texts of the Late Medieval and Early Modern Periods.

PIMS

STUDIES AND TEXTS 161

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*The Reform of Catholicism,  
1480–1620*

*Translated and annotated by*

JAMES K. FARGE



PONTIFICAL INSTITUTE OF MEDIAEVAL STUDIES

*Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication*

Bedouelle, Guy

The reform of Catholicism, 1480–1620 / Guy Bedouelle ; translated and annotated by James K. Farge.

(Catholic and recusant texts of the late medieval and early modern periods ; 1)

(Studies and texts, ISSN 0082–5328 ; 161)

Translation of *La réforme du catholicisme (1480–1620)*.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978–0–88844–161–4

1. Catholic Church – History – 16th century. 2. Counter-Reformation.  
I. Farge, James K., 1938– II. Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies  
III. Title. IV. Series. V. Series: Studies and texts (Pontifical Institute of  
Mediaeval Studies) ; 161

BR430.B4313 2008

270.6

C2008–906500–X

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Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies

59 Queen's Park Crescent East

Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 2C4

[www.pims.ca](http://www.pims.ca)

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*In memory of*

Msgr Eugenio Corecco (1935–1995),

*bishop of Lugano*



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## Abbreviations

For publication details, please consult the bibliographies, pp. 137–51.

<i>Canons and Decrees</i>	<i>Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent</i> , ed. and trans. Henry Joseph Schroeder
CT	<i>Concilium Tridentinum: diariorum, actuum, epistularum, tractatum nova collectio</i> , ed. Societas Goerresiana
LW	<i>Luther's Works</i> , ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann
Mansi	<i>Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio</i> , ed. Giovanni-Domenico Mansi et al.
Olin	<i>The Catholic Reformation: Savonarola to Ignatius Loyola; Reform in the Church, 1495–1540</i> , ed. John C. Olin
Tanner, <i>Decrees</i>	<i>Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils</i> , ed. Norman P. Tanner
WA	<i>D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe</i> [Weimarer Ausgabe], ed. J.K.F. Knaake et al.

## *Translator's Note*

The original French version of this book, *La réforme du catholicisme (1480–1620)*, appeared in the series “Histoire du christianisme” (Paris: Cerf, 2002), of which the author is also the general editor. An Italian translation, *La riforma del cattolicesimo (1480–1620)* (Milan: Jaca Book), appeared in 2003, and a Spanish one – *La reforma del catolicismo (1480–1620)* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos) – in 2005. In it Guy Bedouelle provides a general synthesis of the movement of Church reform in the sixteenth century and presents his personal interpretation of its vicissitudes, successes, and significance. While Professor Bedouelle recognizes the validity of the terminology that other historians have applied to the reform movement and of the approaches to it and interpretations of it that they have put forward, he proposes that the ideas, agenda, and actions of the Catholic Church in the sixteenth century are best conveyed by the title he has chosen for the book: *The Reform of Catholicism*.

The French, Italian, and Spanish versions of this book appeared in series that were primarily directed at a general readership. As such, they provided no footnotes or annotation, although some minimal documentation was inserted into the text itself. The sources consulted by the author were listed in the Essential Bibliography, which was then divided into two sections – one on the concept of Catholic reform, the other on its history.

This English translation is aimed at a wider audience that will include not only the general reader but also students in the classroom and others who may want to research particular points more thoroughly. For this reason, I have opted to provide footnote references with detailed documentation of the sources on which the text relies. When possible, English-language sources, both primary and secondary, have also been provided. In the footnotes and in constructing the Bibliography, I have placed in the short Select Bibliography the sources which most prominently served both Guy Bedouelle and me. All other sources consulted, as well as some of the other sources available in English, are listed in the General Bibliography. Any

errors or omissions in the footnotes and bibliographies are attributable to me alone, not to Professor Bedouelle.

It has been both a privilege and an education for me to translate this work composed by a distinguished author whose more than twenty published books cover a wide range of subjects in early modern and modern religious history.

James K. Farge, CSB  
Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies

## *Preface to the English Edition*

The period stretching from the end of the fifteenth century to the beginning of the seventeenth – roughly, 1480 to 1620 – left its mark on the history of the West in a number of fundamental ways. In regard to the Catholic church, that era produced an ecclesiastical order, doctrinal interpretations, and disciplinary norms which held sway in the Church right up to the Second Vatican Council in the mid-twentieth century.

This reform within the Roman Church has been widely – and often very well – studied. The terms which different historians have chosen to sum up its impact on history usually reveal the particular angle or position from which they have viewed it. Early on, they tended to refer to it as “the Counter-Reformation,” thus choosing to regard Catholic reform primarily as a reaction to “the Reformation” (which required no further modifier as “Protestant”). Somewhat later, some historians realized it was necessary to speak of “the Catholic Reformation” in order to take into account the many vital reform measures undertaken in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century – initiatives prior to and quite independent of Protestantism. This was a time when historians began to profit from methodologies employed by other sciences, such as sociology, in order to discover and appreciate the lively piety and commitment of the people of God in the “pre-Reformation” years.

The present book has no wish to deny or supplant the importance of those two approaches: the Catholic reaction to Protestantism (“Counter-Reformation”) and the concrete, collective life of the Catholic people (“Catholic Reformation”). But it does, however, propose to introduce a supplementary nuance to those interpretations. Quite simply, it describes how the reform within the Roman Church was achieved by an initial ferment and a later coordination of endeavours emanating from its traditional geographic and jurisdictional centre. The book goes into some detail to describe how the Council of Trent played a strategic role in legislating reform in the Church and how it empowered structures to carry it out. At the same time, however, the book also maintains that none of that would have been effective

without a renewed spirit at all levels of society and without the dedicated action of men and women – some famous, others anonymous – who were agents of the reform both prior to and after the Council.

Taking this approach also enables us better to understand how, starting in the decades between 1530 and 1560, the belief and practice of Catholics came to constitute a “Catholicism” – much in the way that other Christians yearning for reform constituted a “Lutheranism,” a “Calvinism,” or an “Anglicanism.” Recent historiography underlines this ecclesiastical phenomenon of “confessionalization.” The thesis of this book and the title I have given it – “The Reform of Catholicism” – maintains that, as part of any interpretation of the wide range of global history, we should not fail to acknowledge the strategic role of the ecclesiastical institution which inspired the groups and individuals acting under its aegis.

Admittedly limited in scope by its brevity, this book owes much, at several stages of its preparation, to others. I am grateful, first of all, to my students at the Université de Fribourg in Switzerland and then, at a second stage, to a group of young historian friends. As well, the present book has profited from the reactions and remarks of several authors of reviews of the original French version and of the manuscript of this English one. But this book would not be what it has become – with its added complement of footnote references, annotations, extended bibliographies, and indexes – without the painstaking work of James K. Farge, whose works on the religious and intellectual scene in early sixteenth-century France are well known. He has produced a remarkably fluent English translation and, in using his historian’s insight, has posed questions which have enabled me to introduce a number of precisions and clarifications into this English edition. I extend here my heartfelt gratitude to him. Together we hope this book will serve well those who seek to know more about this strategic era in the history of Christianity.

Guy Bedouelle, OP  
 Rector, Université catholique de l’Ouest (Angers, France)  
 Feast of St Ignatius of Loyola, 31 July 2008