



Speaker: In response to Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church set about, once again, to reinvent Rome just as it had during the Renaissance. Once again, Popes became fabulous patrons of the art and architecture and utilized art to defend the prestige of the Catholic Church and to keep the faithful within the folds of the church. Between 1545 and 1563, the Catholic Church held three sessions, and this is very important, they were called the Council of Trent and the council was charged with a strategy to counter the Protestant Reformation.

The term counter-reformation applies to this religious and political change that's spread from Rome. The council wrote that, "By means of the stories of the mysteries of our redemption, portrayed by paintings or other representations whereby the people shall be instructed and confirmed in the habit of remembering and continually evolving in the mind the articles of faith."

As part of the council's recommendations, art should be easily understood, this was a direct reaction against the mannerist style of art. Do you remember mannerism from the Renaissance era? Mannerist paintings tended to be for the educated elite and they used lots of allegory and they featured the artist's virtuosity, they were very decorative and complex and hard to understand, and sometimes a little disturbing, and are still very difficult for the common person to date even understand because so many of these allegories have been lost over time.

As a counter to the mannerism, a style was created that had a narrow focus on subject matter, it was very dramatic and emotional in its presentation in order to very clearly communicate to the faithful followers the message of the Church and to inspire spiritual fervor. Additionally, the Council directed that music had to be accessible to the common person and the lyrics were to be easily understood. The writing of literature and other religious tracts should contain morals and virtues as well as religious ideals.

The style of art that originated out of the counter-reformation, with the edicts of the Council of Trent for the Catholic Church, had such a broad appeal that it influenced secular works as well. In connection with the arts, you should be aware that there were two new religious orders that emerged from the Council of Trent. The Oratorians were founded by St. Philip Neri and they met, informally, in prayer halls called oratorios.

Music played an essential role in their devotional practices, especially vocal music. As these oratorios evolved and the performances evolved, they started to become more dramatic and take on a theatrical effect, in fact, with the inspiration and the forerunners of the oratorios that were developed by George Frideric Handel. In addition to the Oratorians, there was the Jesuit Order of Catholic Priests, which many of you are probably familiar with, and they were established by St. Ignatius Loyola.



These priests followed strict discipline and adopted values of poverty, chastity, and obedience and they became so popular that they served to confessors, or as confessors, to major artists such as Bernini and political leaders as well.

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