
PREFACE

Catholic historians have often described the conciliar era (1413-50) in melodramatic terms. The Council of Constance (1414-18) healed one schism but opened the way for another. The Council of Basel (1431-49) was the villain of the piece; it tried, unsuccessfully, to usurp papal prerogatives. Heroic roles have been assigned to defenders of the Roman primacy: Nicholas of Cusa was called "the Hercules of the Eugenians"; the sobriquets "defender of the faith" or "protector of the faith" have been assigned to the Dominican cardinal Johannes de Turrecremata.¹ In fact, papalist historians have produced a distorted picture of Turrecremata's career, dissolving the outlines of his personality and intellect into the image of a single-minded champion of papal absolutism. Such an approach leaves open only one question: to what extent was Turrecremata a precursor of the First Vatican Council?²

Recent scholarship has raised serious questions about this portrait. One notable challenge has been the demonstration that Turrecremata's papalism did not spring full grown from his forehead. Born into the Great Schism, and a participant in the Council of Constance, Turrecremata initially shared many conciliarist ideas common in his day. He arrived at his highly influential refutation of them only after years of struggle and hard labor.³ Moreover, new light has been cast on Turrecremata's entire career, highlighting the breadth of his interests; the Dominican cardinal was an active reformer, an opponent of heresy, and a patron of the arts, as well as a papal apologist.⁴

In certain respects, none of these recent works does justice to Turrecremata's ecclesiology, his doctrine of the nature and government of the Church. Certainly, no one work explores all the riches of cardinal's thought.⁵ The best and most comprehensive recent studies, those of Karl Binder, tend to summarize the *Summa de ecclesia* and to treat the cardinal's doctrines as agreeing always with modern Roman Catholicism.⁶ A different problem appears in the works of Antony Black, who has discussed Turrecremata's thought in almost purely political terms. Such an analysis omits a crucial dimension of Turrecremata's ecclesiology, namely, his lively concern with the Church's saving mission; no study that ignores this basically religious aspect can be deemed nearly accurate.⁷ The present book attempts to steer between these two poles, presenting a balanced assessment of Turrecremata's ecclesiology within a chronological framework. Primarily institutional questions will be raised, those concerned with the defense of the visible Church and of papal power. However, each answer will consider the spiritual dimension of the problems treated, even when purely spiritual matters are allocated less space in the text. Only thus can we hope to comprehend the doctrines of one of the papacy's greatest apologists, a figure whose authority has been invoked in discussions of the Roman primacy to the present day. Indeed, an accurate understanding of Turrecremata's ecclesiology, with its matching concern for the right order of the institutional Church and the right discipline of clergy and laity, sheds light on the formation of the Catholic position that came to dominate the Counter-Reformation.⁸

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