

Document 2.6

Acts of the Council of Trent (1563)

World Civilizations Resource Center: <http://college.cengage.com/history/world/resources/students/primary/trent.htm>

Introduction

*As the Protestant challenge to Catholicism progressed successfully into the 1540s, calls for a general council to address the question of church reform and to develop strategies to meet the Protestant threat grew louder, especially from Emperor Charles V (r. 1519-1556). Under duress, Pope Paul III (r. 1534-1549) opened the first session of the Council of Trent in 1545. Paul recognized the need for reform but resented imperial pressure to call for a council that might rival papal authority within the church. The Council of Trent met sporadically over the next three decades in three sessions (1545-1547, 1551-1552, 1562-1563) broken up by political infighting, papal deaths, and outbreaks of plague. If disjointed, the council nevertheless resulted in a spectacular resurgence for Catholicism and, with the parallel development of the Jesuit order, capped a period of retrenchment and renewal known as the Catholic Reformation. At Trent, Catholic leaders rejected all attempts to compromise with Protestantism and retained the basic positions of the Roman Church, including the Latin Mass, the veneration of saints, the cult of the Virgin Mary, and the notion that salvation required both faith and good works. **They defended Catholic theology and emphasized reforms, ordering an end to abuses of power and corruption within the clergy and establishing seminaries to educate priests.** Finally, the council came out strongly in support of papal power, strengthening the authority of the papacy. **In short, the Catholic Reformation, and especially the Council of Trent, stopped the momentum of the Protestant Reformation and set the stage for an escalation of religious warfare throughout Europe. Catholics began to regain large parts of the continent, and by 1650 at least half of all Protestants had reconverted.***

DEFENSE OF THE CATHOLIC FAITH

The universal Church has always understood that the complete confession of sins was instituted by the Lord, and is of divine right necessary for all who have fallen into sin after baptism; because our Lord Jesus Christ, when about to ascend from earth to heaven, left **priests**, his own **vicars**, as **leaders** and **judges**, before whom all the mortal offenses into which the faithful of Christ may have fallen should be carried, in order that, in accordance with the power of the keys, they may pronounce the sentence of forgiveness or of retention of sins. For it is manifest that priests could not have exercised this judgment without knowledge of the case....

This holy Council enjoins on all bishops and others who are charged with teaching, that they instruct the faithful diligently concerning the intercession and invocation of saints, the honor paid to relics, and the legitimate use of images. Let them teach that the saints, who reign together with Christ, offer up their own prayers to God for men; that it is good and useful suppliantly to invoke them, and to have recourse to their prayers and aid in obtaining benefits from God, through his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who is our sole Redeemer and Saviour....

If any one saith that the New Testament does not provide for a **distinct, visible priesthood**; or that this priesthood has not any power of consecrating and offering up the true body and blood of the Lord, and of forgiving and retaining sins, but is only an office and bare ministry of preaching the gospel; or that those who do not preach are not priests at all; **let him be anathema....**

If any one saith that in the Catholic Church there is not a hierarchy instituted by divine ordination, consisting of bishops, priests, and ministers; **let him be anathema.**

If any one saith that the **sacraments** of the new law were not all instituted by Jesus Christ, our Lord; or that they are more or less than seven, to wit, baptism, confirmation, the eucharist, penance, extreme unction, orders, and matrimony; or even that any one of these seven is not truly and properly a sacrament; **let him be anathema....**

ADVOCACY OF CHURCH REFORM

Such instruction shall be given in accordance with the form which will be prescribed for each of the sacraments by this holy Council in a catechism, which the bishops shall take care to have faithfully translated into the vulgar tongue, and to have expounded to the people by all parish priests. They shall also explain in the said vulgar tongue, during the solemnization of mass, or the celebration of the divine offices, on all festivals or solemnities, the sacred oracles and the maxims of salvation....

It is to be desired that those who undertake the office of bishop should understand what their portion is, and comprehend that they are called, not to their own convenience, not to riches or luxury, but to labors and cares, for the glory of God. For it is not to be doubted that the rest of the faithful also will be more easily excited to religion and innocence if they shall see those who are set over them not fixing their thoughts on the things of this world, but on the salvation of souls and on their heavenly country...

This Council not only orders that bishops be content with modest furniture, and a frugal table and diet, but that they also give heed that in the rest of their manner of living, and in their whole house, there be nothing seen which is alien to this holy institution, and which does not manifest simplicity, zeal toward God, and a contempt of vanities.

It strictly forbids them, moreover, to strive to enrich their own kindred or domestics out of the revenues of the Church; seeing that even the canons of the apostles forbid them to give to their kindred the property of the Church, which belongs to God....

Source: Acts of the Council of Trent, in James Harvey Robinson, ed., *Readings in European History*, (Boston: Ginn, 1904), 2:156-161.

Questions to Consider

1. In what ways do these decrees illustrate the desire for reform within the Catholic Church? In what ways do they illustrate a desire for continuity?
2. How did the acts in this document put the Catholic Church in a better position to combat Protestantism?

From the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola

Medieval Sourcebook (Fordham University): <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/loyola-spirex.asp>

Document

2.7

Many of the opinions of Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuit Order, are in this document setting out rules for the order and for the Christian life. Note, as you read, what issues brought up by the Protestant Reformation he is protesting or countering.

TO HAVE THE TRUE SENTIMENT WHICH WE OUGHT TO HAVE IN THE CHURCH MILITANT

Let the following Rules be observed:

FIRST RULE: All judgment laid aside, we ought to have our mind ready and prompt to obey, in all, the true Spouse of Christ our Lord, which is our holy Mother the Church Hierarchical.

SECOND RULE: To praise confession to a Priest, and the reception of the most Holy Sacrament of the Altar once in the year, and much more each month, and much better from week to week, with the conditions required and due....

FOURTH RULE: To praise much Religious Orders, virginity and continence, and not so much marriage as any of these.

FIFTH RULE: To praise vows of Religion, of obedience, of poverty, of chastity and of other perfections...

SIXTH RULE: To praise relics of the Saints, giving veneration to them and praying to the Saints; and to praise Stations, pilgrimages, Indulgences, pardons, Crusades, and candles lighted in the churches....

EIGHTH RULE: To praise the ornaments and the buildings of churches; likewise images, and to venerate them according to what they represent.

NINTH RULE: Finally, to praise all precepts of the Church, keeping the mind prompt to find reasons in their defense and in no manner against them.

TENTH RULE: We ought to be more prompt to find good and praise... the ways of our Superiors....

THIRTEENTH RULE: To be right in everything, we ought always to hold that the white which I see, is black, if the Hierarchical Church so decides it, believing that between Christ our Lord, the Bridegroom, and the Church, His Bride, there is the same Spirit which governs and directs us for the salvation of our souls. Because by the same Spirit and our Lord Who gave the ten Commandments, our holy Mother the Church is directed and governed.

FOURTEENTH RULE: Although there is much truth in the assertion that no one can save himself without being predestined and without having faith and grace; we must be very cautious in the manner of speaking and communicating with others about all these things.

FIFTEENTH RULE: We ought not, by way of custom, to speak much of predestination; but if in some way and at some times one speaks, let him so speak that the common people may not come into any error....

SIXTEENTH RULE: In the same way, we must be on our guard that by talking much and with much insistence of faith, without any distinction and explanation, occasion be not given to the people to be lazy and slothful in works, whether before faith is formed in charity or after.

SEVENTEENTH RULE: Likewise, we ought not to speak so much with insistence on grace that the poison of discarding liberty be engendered. So that of faith and grace one can speak as much as is possible with the Divine help for the greater praise of His Divine Majesty, but not in such way, nor in such manners, especially in our so dangerous times, that works and free will receive any harm, or be held for nothing.

EIGHTEENTH RULE: Although serving God our Lord much out of pure love is to be esteemed above all; we ought to praise much the fear of His Divine Majesty, because not only filial fear is a thing pious and most holy, but even servile fear -- when the man reaches nothing else better or more useful -- helps much to get out of mortal sin. And when he is out, he easily comes to filial fear, which is all acceptable and grateful to God our Lord: as being at one with the Divine Love.