

The council of trent



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The Council of Trent was an ecumenical council convoked by the Church in 1545 and ran until 1563. It was convoked by Pope Paul III but continued by Popes Julius III and Pius IV. The purpose of the council was to address the growing threat presented by the rising Protestant movement which was rapidly spreading all over Europe, winning believers to their side and threatening the very existence of the Catholic Church and faith.

It was convoked when the Church realized that the Reformation was a serious threat as it involved several secular leaders whom Martin Luther had won over to his side and it was no longer a mere theological debate but had social and political implications at this point in time. In a way, the Council had somehow succeeded in getting the Church from its “ medieval” image and bring it into the modern times which would be followed up by subsequent councils, the First and Second Vatican Councils (McNally 36). The Council addressed the issues that spurred the Protestants into action.

One particular issue that the Council did address was the apparent corruption in the Church as an institution including the sale of indulgences which triggered Luther's “ rebellion” (Mendham 317). The Council abolished several of these illegal practices and introduced or recommended disciplinary reforms providing a provision governing the conduct of the religious, particularly those belonging to monastic and mendicant orders where they “ shall order their lives in accordance to what is prescribed by the rule which they have professed.

” The result of this was it checked corruption in the Church and helped restore “ back to basics” policies where the religious were reminded to uphold the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience that they took upon

entering the orders after years of strife affected the Church leading it to be infiltrated and influenced by political figures which changed its direction and led to the near-loss of its credibility. In addition, it also led to further education of the clergy and the codification of religious orders (Roman Catholic Church, Session 25; Fisher 402).

But this was the only "correction" the Church made. The rest were reaffirmations of other church traditions that hardly changed at all. These were considered part of Church traditions which Protestants opposed, believing that they were "invented" by Catholics as Protestants subscribed to "sol scriptura," relying on the Bible as their source of "tradition." Among them were the sacraments where Protestants found most of them "unnecessary" yet the Church upheld it.

They clarified the issue on the saints and the Blessed Virgin Mary by stating that they are only to be "venerated," not "worshipped," something Protestants accused Catholics, charging that this was bordering on idolatry or paganism, as well as stressing the necessity of good works to go with one's faith rather than relying on faith alone. They made use of the Bible in defending the practice of the sacraments, stating they were not inventions and were stated in Scripture though implicit (Madrid 111).

Another issue that was upheld was the infallibility of the Pope. Notwithstanding the scandals that undermined the image of the papacy, the Council upheld the Pope's place as the Vicar of Christ and the head of all Christendom. It can be inferred here that there was still the need of a leader who could transcend spiritual and secular realms, especially during this time

when Reformation brought more upheavals and instability (Luebke 45, Madrid 44-53).

As an epilogue, this was addressed once again in the Second Vatican Council in 1963 and the infallibility issue was resolved once and for all here. In conclusion, the Council of Trent cannot be entirely credited in ensuring the survival and continued existence of the Catholic faith but was rather part of the Counter-Reformation that had somewhat checked the spread of Protestantism.

It was able to uphold and defend the traditions the Church regard as part of professing one's faith, thereby throwing back the accusations Protestants hurled at it for being on the wrong side of faith. As a parting shot, Catholic apologists in the Council of Trent and beyond, have riposted Protestant arguments by stating (ironically) that their existence was because of the Church and had there been no Church, they never would have existed at all.

Works Cited Fisher, George P.

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