

The council of trent



Throughout the early 1500s many Europeans sought to reform the structure and traditions of the Catholic Church. Riots and protests gradually spread to various parts of Europe causing many authorities including the Catholic Church to panic. The Council of Trent was called in 1545 by Pope Paul III to respond to these concerns and to the Protestant Revolt. It included an ecumenical council made up of all of the bishops of the Catholic Church, which discussed the various concerns presented. This document analysis will not analyze The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent in its entirety. This analysis will focus upon the fourth session written in 1546, and the twenty-third session, including the oration delivered in the last session in 1559 through 1563. The Council was a means to reinforce the authority of the papacy and to fight back against the rise of Protestantism. The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent increased papal authority, as it was intended as a warning for all other forms of Christianity that the authority and legitimacy of the Catholic Church was not to be questioned or threatened. The Council of Trent was vital in the consolidation of papal power.

The Council of Trent gives us insight into the power of the Catholic Church in the mid 1500s. Although its numbers had been dwindling, the Catholic Church had the ability fight back in force. We can assume by the authoritative language of the Council of Trent that the Catholic Church greatly feared the growing strength of the protestant movement throughout Europe. The power of the church is evident by the aggressive language in the document such as “ no one dare or presume under any pretext whatsoever to reject it” and by authorities describing those who do not

follow the canons as an “ anathema”. An anathema in essence means condemning someone to hell. Even after the charges by reformists such as Luther and Calvin, the Catholic Church still had the influence to directly threaten and condemn Protestantism. The Council of Trent legitimizes under Catholic law, papal authority to do whatever necessary to prevent the spread of Protestantism and bring former Catholics back to the church in numerous ways.

First, The Council of Trent increased papal authority by passing a decree concerning the publication of sacred books. The Council states that canonical books (the Bible) should be printed in its entirety as they are in the Vulgate edition. The Council states that “ If any one receive not, as sacred and canonical, the said books entire with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church, and as they are contained in the old Latin vulgate edition...let him be anathema.” The Vulgate edition included deuterocanonicals, which were books not available in Hebrew yet were deemed acceptable to be included in the Bible. The Protestants did not accept these books as canonical and called it biblical “ apocrypha”. This gives us greater indication that the Council of Trent was among other things, a counter in reaction to the teachings of Protestantism.

Secondly, The Council of Trent increased papal authority by legitimizing enforcement methods to stop the spread of any edition of sacred documents not verified by the Catholic Church. The Council states that “ the Vulgate edition, be printed in the most correct manner possible; and that it shall not be lawful for any one to print, or cause to be printed, any books whatsoever, on sacred matters, without the name of the author...unless they shall have

been first examined and approved by the Ordinary.” Moreover the council states that “ Those who led...shall be subject to the same penalties as printers...they who have them in their possession or shall read them, shall, unless they discover the authors, be themselves regarded as the authors” This would have harsh implications as just having a copy of an anonymous biblical text would deem you legally responsible and subject to punishment. It must be noted that Luther published his Bible in 1534, which meant that the Council of Trent deemed Luther to be a threat to the Catholic Church. They soon took the necessary means to prevent its (and other bible translations) publication. This could also give us a greater appreciation of the significance of the Gutenberg Press which could produce multiple copies of works rapidly. The Catholic Church must have felt their power to centralize production of biblical texts was diminishing. The Council of Trent would legitimize the authority of the papacy that The Catholic Church’s interpretation of the bible would be absolute.

Thirdly, The Council of Trent increased papal power by equating Catholic Church tradition with the scripture. The Council states that “ Truth and discipline are contained in the written books, and the unwritten traditions which, received by the Apostles from the mouth of Christ himself...have come down to us, transmitted as it were from hand to hand.” This would have the potential to greatly enhance papal authority on which interpretation of the bible would be permitted. This would also be a direct counter to refute and denounce the protestant belief that man can learn everything he needed to know about God through scripture alone and his individual relationship with Christ.

We can also notice from The Council of Trent, that papal authority to ordinate priests and bishops is consolidated. The Council states that those which are not officially ordained by the Catholic Church are “to be regarded as thieves and robbers.” The Catholic Church criminalizes protestant desires for the common people to elect their own priests and bishops. Moreover the Council enforces the legitimacy of their bishops who are chosen by the Roman pontiff. “If anyone says that the bishops who are chosen by the authority of the Roman pontiff are not true and legitimate bishops, but merely human deception, let him be anathema.” Again, this is an indication that the Council of Trent was a direct refutation of the growing protestant rituals which broke with Catholic tradition.

Finally, The Council of Trent firmly placed the authority in the hands of the papacy to declare that “only those who are known for their virtues, not for their own ambition, who will serve the interests of the people, not their own, and who desire to be useful rather than invested with authority, will be chosen for the discharge of ecclesiastical offices.” This decree gave the church the authority to expel those who did not live up to the standards of the Catholic Church. This is an indication that the Catholic Church believed that it needed to reform itself in some way to convince the masses that they were taking steps to stamp out corruption.

It could also be beneficial to consider the impact of the Council of Trent on the authority of princes and other secular rulers. The Council “deemed it proper that secular princes also be admonished of their duty; being confident that as Catholics whom God has willed to be protectors of the holy faith and church.” The Council of Trent gave princes the opportunity to potentially use <https://assignbuster.com/the-council-of-trent-essay-samples/>

the authority of the church to suppress supporters of the reformation. This is an indication that the Church was willing to work with princes to ensure the survival of Catholicism and the destruction of Protestantism.

The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent is clearly a biased document and does not give us the opposing opinions of the Protestants throughout Europe. Furthermore, this document does not attempt to understand, or reconcile the grievances of the Protestants. Thus it makes no attempt to legitimize the criticism of the Catholic Church by Protestants, but to criminalize their criticism. It is written by an ecumenical council to legitimize in writing, their prosecution of what they deem to be blasphemy. However, we can assume that numerous people throughout Europe still valued the opinion of the Catholic Church. With the proclamation of the Council of Trent, Catholics saw their church take action against the rising power of Protestantism, and it would be safe to imagine that their fears would diminish following the publication of the Council of Trent. It is apparent throughout the document, that the Council of Trent centralizes the decision making process of the Catholic Church and its ability to persecute individuals who contradicted their strict interpretation of the Christian faith. It is evident after carefully analyzing the text that The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent increased papal authority, as it was intended as a warning for all other forms of Christianity that the authority and legitimacy of the Catholic Church was not to be questioned or threatened.