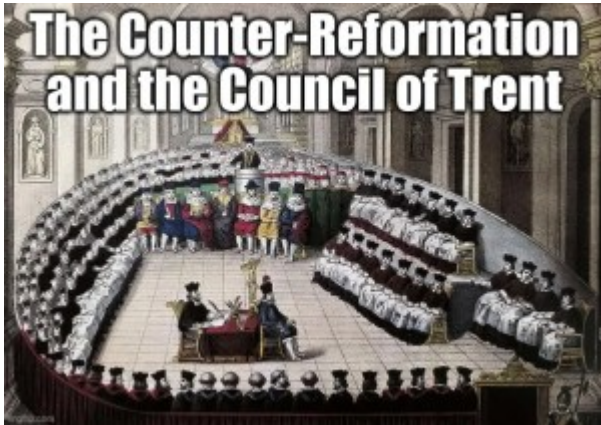


The Papal System – VIII. The Council of Trent



Continued from [The Papal System – VII. The Pope Claims to be Lord of Kings and Nations – Part 3. The Excommunication of Queen Elizabeth.](#)

As this ecclesiastical legislature has a wider reputation and influence in the Church of Rome than any convention of prelates known to history, and as it interests Protestants more than any assemblage of Catholic bishops ever called together, a brief sketch of the synod is indispensable to the completeness of this work. The Council of Trent acted on the baseless assumption that

The Holy Spirit directed its Decisions.

In the fifteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles there is an account given of a consultation between the apostles and elders about circumcision in its bearings upon Gentile converts. The conference ended in a decree which was introduced in these words: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things." The apostles, of course, were inspired men, qualified by the Spirit of God to write Scripture, and give infallible decisions about everything pertaining to the government and instruction of the Church of God. From this record of the proceedings of inspired apostles at Jerusalem, Romish ecclesiastics have found the doctrine that their uninspired bishops, convened in a General Council, are led by the Holy Spirit in everything; and, as a result, that their decrees are the decisions of the Fountain of Wisdom, incapable of error, and invested with perpetual force. Acting upon this conviction, the decree of a General Council, for ages, begins thus: "The sacred and holy (Ecumenical and General Synod of _____, lawfully assembled, *in the Holy Spirit.*" There is no more authority for the assumption that the Comforter leads a Catholic Council to right conclusions because he discharged this office for the apostles, than there would be to imagine that he would enable it to make Holy Scripture whenever a synod tried its hand at writing "Revelations," because he gave this power to the apostles. Nothing has made great synods look more ridiculous than this, even in the opinion of some Catholics.

At Trent, the idea that the Spirit governed the council was a standing joke with many of the witty fathers. As nothing could be done without orders from Rome, it became a common proverb among the bishops that: "The synod was guided by the Holy Spirit, sent thither from time to time from Rome in a cloak-bag."

The Bishop of "Five Churches," one of the leading men in the synod, declared that: "The Holy Spirit had nothing to do in that assembly; that all the counsels given there proceeded from human policy, and tended only to maintain the pope's immoderate and shameful domination; that answers were expected from Rome as from the oracles of Delphos and Dodona (sarcasm); that the Holy Spirit, which they boast doth govern their councils, was sent from thence in a postilion's cloak-bag, which, in case of any inundations, could not come thither (a thing most ridiculous), until the waters were assuaged. So it came to pass that the Spirit was not upon the waters, as it is in Genesis, but by the waters. Oh, monstrous, extraordinary madness!"

The Causes which led to the calling of the Council of Trent

The court of Rome, in the early part of the sixteenth century, was flagrantly corrupt. No language could be too strong to describe its falsehood and treachery, and its accursed love of money, its sumptuous extravagance, its loathsome licentiousness, its fierce despotism, and its unrelenting cruelty. Its turpitude was known over the world, and shocked the moral sense of all Christian nations; so that, wherever the name of Jesus was breathed with reverence, there was one universal demand, that there should be a reformation in the Church, in its head and in its members. Princes were disquieted on their thrones by these demands; popes shook in the chair of the Fisherman as they rung in their ears; and all Europe felt the first vibrations of a coming earthquake, that would shake, and eventually overturn, the throne of the Man of Sin, and give an impetus to liberty and intelligence that would reach the ends of the earth, and the limits of the empire of-time.

St. Bernard writes to Pope Eugenius: "Your court receives good men, but makes them not: lewd men thrive there; the good pine and fall away." This statement was true to the letter of the court of Clement VII. Indeed his predecessor, Adrian VI., admitted that "the mischief proceeded from the court of Rome and the ecclesiastical order," which had provoked Germany, and excited heart-burnings in all Christian countries.

Dante, in his visit to the infernal regions; represents himself as seeing a pope in a part of hell where exquisite torture was inflicted, of whom he says:

He a new Jason shall be called; of whom
In Maccabees we read; and favor such
As to that priest his king indulgent showed,
Shall be of France's monarch shown to him,
I know not if I here too far presumed,
But in this strain I answered: Tell me, now,
What treasures from St. Peter at the first
Our Lord demanded, when he put the keys

Into his charge? Surely, he asked no more,
But follow me! Nor Peter, nor the rest,
Or gold, or silver of Matthias took,
When lots were cast upon the forfeit place
Of the condemned soul. Abide thou there;
Thy punishment of right is merited;
And look thou well to that ill-gotten coin,
Which against Charles thy hardihood inspired.
If reverence for the keys restrained me not,
Which thou in happier days didst hold, I yet
Severer speech might use. Your avarice
O'ercasts the world with mourning, under foot
Treading the good, and raising bad men up.
Of gold and silver you have made your god,
Differing wherein from the idolater,
But that he worships one, a hundred you?
Ah! Constantine, to how much ill gave birth,
Not thy conversion, but that plenteous dower
Which the first wealthy Father gained from thee."

Such, in Dante's day, was the common opinion among thinking men about several popes. The conviction grew stronger towards the sixteenth century; and, in its first half, the universal remedy for these evils was a general council. As Luther commenced his great work, the papal system, the work of ages, and the pride of millions, tottered to its underworld foundations, the wildest excitement rolled over Europe; a vast upheaval threatened to overturn German thrones, and the foundations of society in that land. Its princes, Diet and emperor, time and again, demanded a council, and other countries united in the urgent appeal. Clement VII. is frightened by the cry. He is of illegitimate birth, a stain which, in his day, was regarded as a disqualification for Peter's chair. And he is charged with securing the popedom by unhallowed means. A general council might depose him, as Constance served John XXIII. But he is compelled, in 1531, to promise a synod which he never intended to gather.

At first, Mantua is the proposed place of meeting for the council, then Piacenza. But, as in either place the synod would be wholly at the mercy of the pontiff, the Germans made resistance, and insisted that it should be held in their country. There was, however, no council till Clement was in his grave. After an agitation running over many years and all Christendom, it was at last decided by Paul III. to call a council.

Those who were invited to the Council.

Paul summoned all patriarchs, archbishops, bishops, abbots, and those who, by privilege, should appear in a general synod; also, the emperor, king of France, and all other kings, dukes and princes; and, should they be unable to appear in person, they were to send representatives.

The council was most anxious to have the Protestants represented in it; and, to induce them to appear at its meetings, it sent them several safe-conducts, whose proffered protection they obstinately refused. They demanded that it

should be held in Germany; that the bishops should be released from their oath of obedience to the pope; that he, neither in person nor by legates, should preside in the council; and that, if they came to it, they should be entitled to vote as well as to deliberate; and, failing to secure these requisites of justice, they utterly refused to take any part in the discussions of the approaching great synod. The council met December 13th, 1545, at

Trent.

Trent is in the southern part of the Tyrol, on the left bank of the Adige, in a beautiful valley, surrounded by lofty hills. It is nearly fifty miles north of Verona. It is an Austrian possession. Its cathedral was commenced in the beginning of the thirteenth century, and it is a fine architectural work. The Church of Santa Maria Maggiore stands on the site of the structure in which the Council of Trent held its meetings.

The Synod.

Its presiding officers were the legates, Cardinal John Maria de Monte, Cardinal Marcellus Cervinus, and Cardinal Reginald Pole. Paul III. gave these cardinals their positions.

At the session held on the 7th of January, 1546, there were present, beside the legates and the cardinal of Trent, four archbishops, twenty-eight bishops, three abbots and four generals of religious orders. Of the archbishops, two were titular, that is bishops without flocks. One of these was Robert Venante, a Scotchman, Archbishop of Armagh in Ireland, who, though nearsighted, had a splendid reputation in Italy as the "best post-rider in the world." These two bishops had lived for years on papal alms, and they gratefully came to Trent to vote for their benefactor's measures.

Only the ambassador of the king of the Romans was present at the first session, At a later period every state of any note belonging to the Catholic Church was represented by secular ambassadors in the synod, who made speeches in that body, and took an active part in its affairs. What a scanty delegation of bishops to legislate for the universal Church in a general council.

The modes of transacting Business adopted by the Council.

A special congregation or committee was appointed to examine every question, and frame decrees for the general congregation, in which all were free to express their sentiments, and fit the subject under discussion for formal proclamation as a decree or canon. A session was the meeting when the perfected work received the final vote, and the solemn sanction of the synod as a part of the code of the Catholic Church.

In a congregation the prelates wore caps; in a session they appeared with miters in all the pomp of episcopal dignity.

The right of speaking in the synod in 1551 was given to the pope's

representatives first; the emperor's spoke next; the bishops of Louvain sent by the queen next; after them the divines who came with the electors; secular clergymen in the order of their promotion next; and after them the friars.

The bishops of the council were a jury; inferior clergymen were the lawyers who made speeches; and after their addresses had exhausted the debate, the bishops were generally ready to vote. Of the powerful and learned speeches delivered in the synod, few came from the bishops.

The council decided that the Holy Scriptures might be quoted as authorities, the traditions of the apostles, the decisions of councils, constitutions, the authority of popes and holy fathers, and the consent of the Catholic Church.

The Position of the Pope in the Council of Trent.

The pontiffs watched the deliberations of the synod with unwearied vigilance; they viewed its every movement with unhidden jealousy. They used every effort manly and mean to regulate its entire affairs, insignificant and important. If any father was troublesome, means must be used to keep him quiet. If fearless bishops at any time were too numerous, good prelates, who would speak and vote as they were instructed, came speedily from Rome or from some other part of Italy. If the council became conscious of their manhood and their episcopal rank, the synod was threatened with suspension or removal; or the council was disbanded for a time; or it was transferred to some Italian city where the pope was all powerful, or where the persuasive eloquence of an adjacent inquisition would suggest submission to papal dictation.

Every bishop in the Council of Trent at his consecration had to take this oath:

"I, N. C., bishop, will henceforward bear true faith to St. Peter, and to the holy apostolic Roman Church, to my lord the Pope N. and his successors, who shall enter canonically. I will not be a means, either by word or deed, that he may lose either life or member, or be taken prisoner; I will not reveal any counsel he may impart unto me, either by letter or message which may be any way damageable to him; I will help to defend and maintain the papacy of the Church of Rome against all the world, and the rules of the holy fathers."

Each bishop in the synod of Trent was bound hand and foot by this oath, to obey the successor of St. Peter. And the pontiff sent orders to his legates who presided over the council, about the business which was to be pushed forward, or that which was to be excluded, and nothing was formally discussed which had not his approval. He was master of the entire deliberations of Trent.

He used Sacred Bribes and Holy Jest.

To make his authority undoubted he employed ecclesiastics, who watched every father at the synod: at the head of these men, for some time was Simoneta, the confidential manager of the council for his Holiness. Simoneta, with other agents, employed a number of needy bishops who could jest soberly, and

by provoking independent men, make them look ridiculous, while they remained unmoved themselves. These artful operators often broke up congregations of the synod by their sober jokes at the expense of worthy bishops. By their sarcastic interruptions and sneering criticisms at the conclusion of an opposition address, they often created the greatest confusion and, secured the adjournment of a debate which was becoming troublesome to the friends of the pontiff. And as the hirelings of Simoneta were numerous and needy, and as his funds were regularly and largely replenished from Rome, he could silence most opponents, or so tarnish their reputation or orthodoxy by private slanders, that their influence was destroyed.

In 1563, the Emperor Ferdinand wrote Pius IV. to give liberty to the council, of which it had been deprived by three causes: first, everything must be managed at Rome before being presented to the synod; the second difficulty was, that only the presidents could make propositions in the council; and the last was, that prelates bent on the pope's glory rendered their brethren powerless. This difficulty was occasioned by the grave jesters who aided the holy spirit which guided Catholic councils to reach proper conclusions. It can be easily seen that a council whose members were bound to the pope by solemn oaths, whose propositions must all come from his legates, and whose bishops were bribed, browbeaten, or ridiculed, was a mere expression of the pope's will.

One of the Decrees of Trent.

"That the memory of paternal incontinency may be banished as far as possible from places consecrated to God, which purity and holiness most especially become, it shall not be lawful for the sons of clerks, who are not born from lawful wedlock, to hold, in those churches, in which their fathers have, or have had an ecclesiastical benefice, any benefice whatsoever, even though a different one, nor to minister in any way in the said churches, nor to have pensions out of the fruits of benefices which their fathers hold, or have at another time held. And if a father and a son shall be found, at this present time, to hold benefices in the same church, the son shall be compelled to resign his benefice, or to exchange it for another out of that church, within the space of three months; otherwise he shall, by the very fact, be deprived thereof."

A law in any Protestant church forbidding the sons of its clergy, born out of lawful wedlock, to enjoy a benefice jointly with their fathers, would have a ring of iniquity too loud and clear to be misapprehended.

Controversies in the Council.

Men differed in opinions, in feelings, and in proposed acts, And not a few instances of apparent harmony were but compulsory submissions.

The cup (of the Communion ceremony) excited a deeply interesting and prolonged discussion in Trent. It may be safely asserted that three-fourths of the Catholics in Europe were in favor of having it given with the bread. And this preponderance was nearly as great among the clergy as among the laity. In 1562, the ambassador of the Duke of Bavaria, in the council,

demanded the cup for the laity in the name of his master, declaring that Paul III. had granted it to Germany; and he insisted in a spirit of honest earnestness that it should not be refused. The ambassadors of the Emperor Ferdinand about the same time presented a paper to the council, in which they declared, that there were Catholics in Hungary, Austria, Moravia, Silesia, Carinthia, Carniola, Styria, Bavaria, Suevia, and other parts of Germany, who desired the cup with great zeal, In Hungary, said they, "They force the priests to give them the cup by taking away their goods, and threatening to kill them;" and in manly words they appealed for the chalice given by Jesus to all. The legates themselves were strongly inclined to yield to the appeal, and grant the cup to Germany. Pius IV. was equally disposed to gratify one of the most popular desires that ever agitated the Catholic Church. Nor was Charles IX., King of France, a whit less anxious for the cup than the Catholic Emperor and princes of Germany: with him and his people the desire amounted to a passion, and on many occasions it was urged with vehemence on the bishops at Trent.

The Council of Constance, in 1414, had first changed the character of the Supper, by keeping back the chalice: the date was too recent, and the change too senseless to make the people calm, when another council gave them an opportunity to restore the honored forms of other days. Against the change, the talented but unscrupulous party who governed the council, urged that if the Holy Spirit guided councils, he ruled at Constance, and it would be impiety to reverse the decree he inspired there; besides, they said, many demands were made, and if the synod began: to yield, it would be difficult to find a stopping place. They brought in Scripture in abundance to support their positions; they instanced the case in St. John, where it is said: "He that eateth this bread shall live forever;" they pointed to the disciples going to Emmaus, who only knew Jesus in the breaking of bread, not in the drinking of wine: to St. Paul, ready to suffer shipwreck, who blesses bread, but speaks not of wine; to the Lord's Prayer, in which daily bread is asked without any allusion to wine; to the manna which represents the Eucharist, and yet has no drink in it; to Jonathan, who tasted the honey, but did not drink.

James Payva, a Portuguese, declared that when Christ gave the bread to his disciples first, they were all laymen, but when he ordained them priests, in these words: "Do this in remembrance of me," he then gave them the cup. And the cup was therefore only for priests, while the bread was for all.

Another argued in the council that "the cup being the blood of Christ might fall on the ground, or hang on the beard of a layman; that the vessels to hold it would not be kept clean, and that giving it to a layman would make him the equal of a priest." But reasons of this character weighed little; and when the discussion was exhausted there were three opinions, one that it should not be granted, another that the cup should be permitted with conditions, and still another that it should be referred to the pope. And "fifty of the most intelligent persons in the synod maintained that the cup should be conceded with some cautions." And when the question was to be decided, it was found that it could not receive the number required to pass it as a doctrine, it could only receive the vote needed for a decree of

reformation.

It was a maxim in Trent, that "a decree of faith could not be made if a considerable part contradicted; but to establish a decree of reformation, a major part of voices was sufficient." And the cup resolution, though recognized as an article of faith, owing to the impossibility of passing it in its true character for lack of requisite votes, was introduced as a decree of reformation, and by this artifice it became the permanent law of the Catholic Church, and a lasting insult to Jesus.

Claims of the Clergy over Secular Affairs.

Perhaps the most exciting controversy in the Council of Trent was aroused by the presentation of certain articles giving the clergy supremacy in many affairs purely civil. One of these articles declared that ecclesiastical persons should not be judged in a secular court; another, that the civil magistrate shall not interfere in any spiritual case, such as one about matrimony, heresy, patronage, benefices, tithes, ecclesiastical fees, temporal jurisdiction of churches, and other cases civil, criminal, or mixed, belonging to the Ecclesiastical Court; another, that laymen shall not appoint ecclesiastical judges; another declares that the ecclesiastical judge shall be free from secular authority in imposing or revoking excommunications, in summoning whom he will, and in pronouncing sentence of condemnation on him, and in having officers to execute it; another forbids the Emperor, or any other prince, to interfere with ecclesiastical causes or persons by edicts, or otherwise, and commands all sovereigns to lend the secular arm to execute ecclesiastical decisions; another declares that the letters, citations and sentences of ecclesiastical judges, especially of the Court of Rome, shall be immediately executed by all rulers without any consent from the civil authorities. These articles, no doubt, contained the sentiments of three-fourths of the fathers at Trent. In many countries, the articles had been laws at work for centuries, if not fully developed, at least in a modified form. But they raised an immense commotion in every court in Europe, and most of all in Catholic courts. The ambassadors at Trent, were indignant at their presentation, and took the earliest occasion to denounce them.

De Ferrieres, one of the ambassadors of France, among other things, told the council, that their proposed reforms of princes were not the plaster of Isaiah, to heal the wound, but of Ezekiel, to make it raw, though healed before; that these additions of excommunications and curses, were without example in the ancient Church; that their articles had no other aim than to take away the liberty of the French Church, and offend the majesty of the most Christian kings, who, by the example of Constantine, Justinian, and other emperors, have made many ecclesiastical laws. He said, the king marveled at two things: one, that they, the fathers, adorned with so great ecclesiastical power, assembled only to restore church discipline, not regarding this, should bind themselves to reform those whom they ought to obey, though they were stiffnecked; another, that they should think they can and ought, without any admonition, excommunicate and anathematize kings who are given by God to men, which ought not to be done to any ordinary man, though persevering in a most grievous offense.

He said that Michael, the archangel, durst not curse the devil, and yet they were wholly conversant with maledictions against kings, and against his sovereign, if he will defend the laws of his ancestors, and the liberties of the Gallican Church. He told them that the king desired the council not to decree anything against those laws; and his ambassadors to oppose such decrees as he did then oppose them. Afterwards, speaking not for the king but himself, he invoked heaven, earth and the fathers to consider, whether the king's demands were just; whether it were honest for them to make orders for themselves throughout the whole world; whether this was a time to take compassion, not upon the church, nor upon France, but upon themselves, their dignity, reputation, and revenues, which cannot be preserved but by the arts by which they were first obtained; that in so great confusion they must be wary, and not cry when Christ comes, "SEND US INTO THE SWINE;" that if they would restore the Church to its ancient reputation, and compel the adversaries to repentance, and reform princes, they should follow the example of Hezekiah, who did not imitate his father, nor his first, second, third, or fourth grandfather, who were imperfect, but went higher, to the imitation of his perfect ancestor; so the council must not look to its next predecessors, though very learned, but ascend as far as Ambrose, Augustine, and Chrysostom, who overcame the heretics, not by arming princes for war, while they sat picking their nails at home, but by prayers, a holy life, and sincere preaching. For the fathers, becoming like these ancient worthies, will make princes to become Theodosii, Honorii, Areadii, Valentinianii, and Gratiani, which he hoped for, and would praise God if it should be so.

The oration stirred up a perfect tempest in the sacred breasts of the assembled clergy. It was assailed publicly and privately with all kinds of weapons. But its author was sustained by the combined monarchs of Europe, for whom he was scourging the insolence of the council; and both he and his hearers knew well that he had the keen intellect and the material resources which fitted him to defy them. The subject was discussed at great length, and then was allowed to fall into an untimely grave, No spirit guided the Council of Trent but the unholy spirit of cunning, tyranny, worldliness, obsequiousness, and superstition. Little wonder that the witty French made a proverb: That the modern council has more authority than that of the apostles, for its own pleasure only was a sufficient ground for its decrees, without admitting the Holy Spirit.

Numbers and Character of the Council.

In 1546 the council was composed of five cardinals and forty eight bishops. It was at this time it issued its famous decrees about the scriptures, giving inspired authority to apocryphal writings and uncertain traditions; and authenticity or superiority over all other copies of the word of God to the Vulgate, a mere version, and one so full of errors that the council itself had to appoint a committee of six to correct it; and restraining men in their proper liberty to discover its meaning.

Among the prelates in the council at this time, there was no man "remarkable for learning, some were lawyers, perhaps learned in that profession, a few divines, but of less than ordinary merit, the greater number were gentlemen

or courtiers. As to their dignities, some were only titular, and the greater part bishops of such small cities, that if each one represented his people, it could not be said that one in a thousand of Christendom was represented, And from Germany at this time there was not one bishop or divine."

In the sixth session, which issued the decrees on justification, there were present four cardinals, ten archbishops, and forty-seven bishops; in the thirteenth, which defined transubstantiation, there were four legates, six archbishops, and thirty-four bishops; in the last session there were, according to Labbé and Cossart, seven legates, two cardinals, three patriarchs, thirty-three archbishops and two hundred and thirty-seven bishops, besides eleven proxies. Of these about two-thirds were from Italy, the rest, with few exceptions, from France and Spain. These Italian bishops and the natives of Italy wearing titular dignities, were all the mere creatures of the pope, and through them the council was constantly in the power of the holy father.

At the close of the proceedings of the council, according to the authoritative report of its doings, four legates, two cardinals, three patriarchs, twenty-five archbishops, one hundred and six eight bishops, seven abbots, thirty-nine proctors of absent prelates, and seven generals of religious orders, subscribed with their own hand the decrees of the council. The number, notwithstanding this statement, at the last meeting of the council, is not to be fully credited. But that most of its sessions were very slenderly attended, and that the attendance was made up of men of limited attainments and ability, is undoubted. Even Paul IV. said scornfully of the council: "It was a great vanity to send into the mountains sixty bishops of the least able and forty doctors of the most insufficient, as was twice done already (1556), and to believe that by those the world could be better regulated than by the vicar of Christ aided by his cardinals, prelates, and doctors at Rome."

The Bishop of Five Churches, in a letter to the Emperor Maximilian, says of the Council of Trent:

"What good could be done in that council in which the votes were not weighed but numbered? If goodness of cause and reason had been the weapons, though we were but few, we had vanquished a great army of our enemies. The pope had a hundred for one, and in case that were not sufficient, he could have created a thousand. We daily saw hungry and needy bishops come to Trent; youths, for the most part, who just began to have beards, given over to luxury and riot, hired only to give their voices as the pope pleased. They were unlearned, and simple, but supplied with impudent boldness. When these were added to the pope's old flatterers, iniquity triumphed, and it was impossible to determine anything but as they pleased.

"There was a grave and learned man, who was not able to bear so great an indignity, and as he made the fact known, he was traduced (maligned) as not a good Catholic, and he was terrified, threatened and persecuted that he might approve things against his will. Matters were brought to this pass by the iniquity of those who came there, fitted and prepared,

that the council seemed to consist, not of bishops, but of disguised maskers, not of men but of images, such as Dedalus made, that moved by nerves which were none of their own. They were hireling bishops, who, as country bagpipes, could not speak but as breath was put into them. The Holy Spirit had nothing to do in this assembly."

Such is the testimony of a man of great power, truth and observation. And yet this council, composed of such materials as it was, gave their present cast to all the doctrines and usages of the Catholic Church. These youthful bishops were no doubt titular prelates, bearing the name of an eastern diocese, and performing no episcopal acts except voting at the Council of Trent.

The Pontiffs who Reigned during the Sessions of the Council.

These were Paul III., Julius III., and Pius IV. The council first assembled in 1545, and after several prorogations (interruptions), and some protracted intermissions, it finally adjourned in 1563.

Influence of the Council.

It exerted for centuries, and it enjoys still, the greatest power ever springing from any assembly of ecclesiastics. The world is more familiar with its name than with the insignificance of its membership; and it is remarkable that such a body should stretch long and vigorous arms over the gulf of time since its dissolution, and over all the Catholic countries of the world, and hold the entire papal nations in its powerful grasp. Several causes contribute to this result: the first is the profound reverence entertained for councils in the Catholic Church. In several Protestant communities there are ecclesiastical legislatures who make authoritative enactments for the government of their churches, but such laws are regarded, even by those who make them, as wise or unwise, according to the principles embodied in them. But a Catholic council, constituted in proper form, is believed to be an "Inspired Assembly," speaking by the promptings of the unerring Jehovah, whose decisions are the revealed will of the Lord of all, which ought not to be questioned, and can never be repealed.

As the clergyman who addressed the Council of Trent, when Mascarenius the Portuguese ambassador was received, said:

"The authority of councils is so great that their decrees are to be received as divine oracles."

Such is the general doctrine of the Catholic Church. And this view of councils gave great force to the decrees issued at Trent.

The second was the extensive range of the council in the adoption of new articles of faith. The synod received every sanctified folly, almost without exception, revered in any quarter of the Romish communion, as a tenet of the Church; and in this way gained a wide extent of favor.

Another reason was the able management of the council by the pontiffs, who selected the shrewdest strategists of the entire papal Church and employed them to direct the decisions of the council.

Another reason is found in the extraordinary deference paid by the bishops of Rome to the canons and enactments of Trent.

The fifth reason why the Council of Trent became such a potent power in the papal Church is to be found in the condition of Catholicism when the council held its meetings. The Reformation, like an earthquake, had shaken and shattered the Romish world, and burst the ties which bound the system together, its old mighty ties of force and terror; and it compelled the council to give a new shape to nearly all her ancient doctrines; and such a cast as would fit them to bear the most searching scrutiny. As worn out rails are rolled again, and after the process come forth totally unlike their former ground, ragged, rusty selves: so in the foundry at Trent, through canons, decrees and the Catechism, the old rails of the Romish system were rolled over again, and some of them received a greater thickness; some of them an altered shape, and all of them new and additional sleepers, to sustain without injury the thundering trains of the great Reformation.

The Church of Rome before the Council of Trent was like a tower built of stones from many ancient structures. A great many came from Solomon's temple, and quite a number from the buildings adjoining the manger in Bethlehem; some jagged rocks were placed upon the tower that once formed a part of a temple of Moloch; not a few stones from a temple of Jupiter; and a block of marble beautifully sculptured from a temple of Venus. Cement made from the rock of Calvary, well crushed, and bitumen from the Dead Sea joined the stones together. The tower was strong, and a source of terror to the world. Lightning from Wittemburg struck it fiercely several times and burned off the roof, exposing the inmates to the pelting fury of the storms, and so shattering the walls that the fathers at Trent, thinking it was going to tumble to pieces, carefully took down the tower and rebuilt and greatly enlarged it. They put in every old stone, carefully placing it in a new position; they procured new materials from the walls of the Sorbonne, the graves of St. Bernard, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Peter Lombard, Gregory VII., and Innocent III., from the battlefields of Judas Maccabeus, and from nearly every quarter of the world. They made the many window sashes and doors out of the wood of the true cross and the nails with which the Saviour was fastened on it. Each one of its many hundred guards imagined that he carried the identical spear with which the soldier pierced the Saviour's side, and every one of them wore some garment which belonged to the Saviour or his mother; the tower was intended to reach heaven, and was indeed a very lofty structure; it was designed as a home for the heroes who should conquer the world, As we have seen a school-house once, whose walls, on close inspection, showed angel figures, a sculptured Holy Spirit, several saints, the plunder of an ancient neighboring nunnery: so, on closely examining this massive tower, you easily detected representations in the stones of Moses, Aaron, Levi, a Jewish altar and sacrifice, a censer, Judas Maccabeus making an offering for his dead soldiers, the virgin and child, Jupiter, Venus, Moloch, the Angelic Doctor, the Master of the Sentences, and other scholastic divines

by the hundred, and saints and angels without number, with an occasional scene from purgatory. The architecture was a mixture of all orders; the building was of all shapes, and the careful observer could easily see above its main doorway its name: BABEL, CONFUSION. While on its corner stone were cut the words: *Built by the fathers of Trent, after designs sent from Rome.*

Continued in [The Papal System – IX. Baptism](#)

All chapters of The Papal System by William Cathcart

- [I. The Ancient British Church](#)
- [II. The Ancient Irish Church](#)
- [III. The Ancient Scottish Church](#)
- [IV. Councils For Seven Centuries Repudiate Papal Jurisdiction](#)
- [V. Christendom at the Beginning of the Seventh Century](#)
- [VI. Steps to Papal Sovereignty Over The Churches – Part 1](#)
- [VI. Steps to Papal Sovereignty Over The Churches – Part 2](#)
- [VII. The Pope Claims to be Lord of Kings and Nations – Part 1](#)
- [The Pope Claims to be Lord of Kings and Nations – Part 2. Pope Innocent III Abolishes the Magna Carta](#)
- [The Papal System – VII. The Pope Claims to be Lord of Kings and Nations – Part 3. The Excommunication of Queen Elizabeth](#)
- [The Papal System – VIII. The Council of Trent](#)
- [The Papal System – IX. Baptism](#)