

Lesson 1: The Counter Reformation and the Religious Struggle in Europe

Introduction

Initially Luther and all the other reformers believed that they were trying to return Christianity to its original roots. However, leaders in the Roman Catholic Church quickly realized that Luther's protests were not just a disagreement within the Church over organization, but were fundamental attacks on Church doctrine and were spreading across Europe. Alarmed at the growing support his ideas were generating and the increasing number of Protestants, the Church responded by calling for a Council to meet and discuss the issues.

Protestant historians have given the name "Counter Reformation" to the actions that culminated in the Council of Trent (1545–1563). Catholic historians see this movement as a continuation of on-going Church reform. Pope Paul III (1534-1549) had clearly seen the need for radical reform in the Church. He worked to revitalize the College of Cardinals, supported the Jesuits, established the Holy Office as the supreme court of appeal for matters of faith and heresy, and convened the Council of Trent.

The Council of Trent that met in three sessions attempted to check and destroy the progress of the Protestant Reformation. In addressing the attacks of Luther, Calvin, and the other Protestant leaders, the Council reaffirmed most of the traditional Catholic practices and beliefs, as the first part of this lesson illustrates.

For lay Catholics, the decisions of the Council meant that all members of the Church were subject to powerful Church enforcement directed by the Church hierarchy. Parishioners were required to confess regularly and to participate in pilgrimages, ceremonies, and processions. Architecture, music, and art all combined to socialize the new orthodoxy in Catholic countries.

In hindsight, the early Reformation had been remarkably free from bloodshed. The Reformation and the Catholic reactions, however, spawned religious wars that swept through Europe from the mid-sixteenth to the seventeenth centuries and involved almost every fledgling state in the continent.

Support for the new orthodoxy was strongest in Italy and Spain, where inquisitions were held to purify the faith. The Spanish Netherlands was a hotbed of competition

between Catholics and Protestants, as was Switzerland. France was less affected by the Counter Reformation, and its leaders, hostile to the Habsburg Dynasties, struggled to remain aloof from the more drastic implications of the Council of Trent. However, the Guises, an ultra-loyal Catholic Orthodox party that strongly supported the Council of Trent's decisions, fomented large-scale attacks on the French Calvinists and sponsored the massacre that occurred on St. Bartholomew's Eve, August 23, 1572, when 2,000 Protestants were murdered in Paris. The wars against the French Protestants, known as Huguenots, were spectacularly un-Christian.

These struggles would eventually shatter the European monarchical traditions. Protestants, unhappy with the rule of Catholic kings, challenged the monarchy, which had always seemed an impregnable political institution. Kings of the new states wanted domestic peace and settling on either Catholicism or Protestantism seemed to be an important prerequisite for maintaining an orderly society. Those areas that emerged from these horrendous religious wars with large groups of both Catholic and Protestant subjects found it difficult to establish powerful new nation states. Those like Spain and France (predominantly Catholic) and like England, Sweden, and the Netherlands (predominantly Protestant) were the most successful of the new states. Germany, riveted with religious conflict, would take much longer to forge a viable German state. The final result of these struggles would be the overthrow and execution of Charles I in England in the middle of the seventeenth century, a historical earthquake that permanently changed the face of Europe. The map at the end of this lesson is intended to illustrate these changes.

Another legacy of the religious wars was to demonstrate that the enormous blood-letting in the name of religion was abhorrent to the growing number of humanists throughout Europe. This disgust with the violence that the religious wars unleashed was a strong factor in the rise of reason and science in the subsequent generations in Europe.

Adapted from Richard Hooker, *World Civilizations*, Washington State University, <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/REFORM/WARS.HTM>.

Student Handout 2.2

A Summary of Some of the Declarations of the Council of Trent

If anyone does not accept as sacred and canonical the aforesaid books in their entirety and with all their parts [the 66 books of the Bible plus 12 apocryphal books], ... as they have been accustomed to be read in the Catholic Church and as they are contained in the old Latin Vulgate Edition, and knowingly and deliberately rejects the aforesaid traditions, let him be anathema.

If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us, let him be anathema.

If anyone says that the justice received is not preserved and also not increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of its increase, let him be anathema.

If anyone says that the Catholic doctrine of justification as set forth by the holy council in the present decree, derogates in some respect from the glory of God or the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, and does not rather illustrate the truth of our faith and no less the glory of God and of Christ Jesus, let him be anathema.

If anyone denies that in the sacrament of the most Holy Eucharist are contained truly, really, and substantially the body and blood together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently the whole Christ, but says that He is in it only as in a sign, or figure or force, let him be anathema.

If anyone says that in the Catholic Church penance is not truly and properly a sacrament instituted by Christ the Lord for reconciling the faithful of God as often as they fall into sin after baptism, let him be anathema.

If anyone denies that sacramental confession was instituted by divine law or is necessary to salvation; or says that the manner of confessing secretly to a priest alone, which the Catholic Church has always observed from the beginning and still observes, is at variance with the institution and command of Christ and is a human contrivance, let him be anathema.

If anyone says that the confession of all sins as it is observed in the Church is impossible and is a human tradition to be abolished by pious people, let him be anathema.

If anyone says that God always pardons the whole penalty together with the guilt and that the satisfaction of penitents is nothing else than the faith by which they perceive that Christ has satisfied for them, let him be anathema.

If anyone says that by those words, "Do this for a commemoration of me," Christ did not institute the Apostles priests; or did not ordain that they and other priests should offer His own body and blood, let him be anathema.

If anyone says that it is a deception to celebrate masses in honor of the saints and in order to obtain their intercession with God, as the Church intends, let him be anathema.

If anyone says that there is not in the New Testament a visible and external priesthood, or that there is no power of consecrating and offering the true body and blood of the Lord and of forgiving and retaining sins, but only the 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 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.

The holy council commands all bishops and others who hold the office of teaching above all to instruct the faithful diligently in matters relating to intercession and invocation of the saints, the veneration of relics, and the legitimate use of images, teaching them that the saints ... offer up their prayers to God for men, that it is good and beneficial suppliantly to invoke them and to have recourse to their prayers, assistance, and support in order to obtain favors from God through His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who alone is our redeemer and savior and that they think impiously who deny that the saints ... pray for men, or that our invocation of them to pray for each of us individually is idolatry, or that it is opposed to the word of God.

The holy council furthermore exhorts ... all pastors, that, like good soldiers, they sedulously recommend to all the faithful all those things which ... have been ordained, and ... especially of those which tend to mortify the flesh, such as the choice of meats, and fasts; as also those which serve to promote piety, such as the devout and religious celebration of festival days.

Lesson 1: Opposing Views — Protestant vs. Catholic

Examine **Student Handout 2.2** and identify which of these views reflect decisions of the Council.

PROTESTANT	CATHOLIC
The Old and New Testaments are the <i>only</i> sources of Christian teaching.	Sources of teaching include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old Testament • New Testament • Catholic Church tradition • Catholic interpretation of the Bible • Certain papal declarations • Bishops in conjunction with the pope • Apocrypha (some additions to the Bible)
We are justified (saved) <i>by faith alone</i> , not by good works. Good works will result in greater rewards in the afterlife but have no effect on getting saved.	When a person is baptized, her or his “original sin” is forgiven and God gives her or him some grace. This grace enables the person to do good works. God appreciates the good works and rewards them with more grace. Because the Christian has more grace, she or he can now do even better works. This pleases God even more, so He gives even more grace.
Purgatory is unscriptural. Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross was the only offering necessary and the only offering sufficient to provide salvation.	There are two types of punishment after death: temporal (temporary) and eternal. If a person dies with just one “mortal” sin on her or his soul she or he will be condemned to Hell for eternity. If the person dies with only “venial” sins on her or his soul, she or he will be sent to Purgatory, perhaps for millions of years. Purgatory is exactly like Hell except that it does not last forever. Eventually, the person will be released to enter Heaven.
“Mortal” sin is an <i>extent</i> of sin, a pervasiveness of sin, sinning <i>as a way of life</i> , sinning as a <i>regular practice</i> , not a <i>single</i> sin, regardless of how serious that sin might be, for example, murder.	There are two types of sin: mortal and venial. A particular sin is either mortal or venial, depending on the severity. (For instance, stealing one dollar from a rich man would probably be a venial sin.) See the box above for the consequences of Catholic mortal sin.
Only God can forgive sins.	Catholic priests have been given the power to forgive sins, acting as representatives of the Holy Spirit.
The Holy Spirit is Jesus’ representative.	The pope is Jesus’ representative on Earth.

Student Handout 2.1

The pope speaks for no one.	The pope speaks for all Christians.
It is clear from Scripture that there was no “head” apostle in the New Testament churches. Paul expressly and publicly rebuked Peter, the alleged first pope, on one occasion. There is no biblical or historical evidence that Peter was ever the bishop of Rome.	Anyone who denies the authority of the pope despises the one who (allegedly) appointed him (i.e., Christ) and therefore despises the one who sent Christ (i.e., God the Father).
Mary had children by Joseph. In the Bible, Jesus’ brothers are expressly named: Joseph, James, Simon, and Jude.	Mary remained a virgin her entire life. The Greek word can mean either “brother” or “close relative.” The Bible is talking about Jesus’ cousins, not brothers.
Protestants believe the claim that Mary remained a virgin and was bodily assumed into Heaven is unscriptural.	Mary was bodily assumed into Heaven, like Elijah and Enoch.
Protestants believe that claiming Mary is the “spiritual mother” of all men is unscriptural.	Mary is the “spiritual mother” of all men.
There are no monks or nuns. Protestant ministers may marry.	Monasteries and nunneries are maintained, and priests and nuns are required to be celibate.