The Council of Trent: Sessions 2, 4 and 5

Session 2 (January 7, 1546)
Decree Concerning The Manner Of Living And Other Matters To Be Observed During The Council

The holy Council of Trent, lawfully assembled in the Holy Ghost and presided over by the same three legates of the Apostolic See, recognizing with the blessed Apostle James that every best gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, who, to those who ask of Him wisdom, giveth to all abundantly and upbraideth them not; and knowing also that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, has ordained and decreed that each and all of the faithful of Christ assembled in the city of Trent be exhorted, as they are hereby exhorted, to amend themselves in the evils and sins hitherto committed and to walk henceforth in the fear of the Lord; not to fulfill the lusts of the flesh,[4] to be instant in prayer, to confess more often, to receive the sacrament of the Eucharist, to frequent the churches, to observe, so far as each one is able, the commandments of the Lord, and to pray daily in private for peace among the Christian princes and for unity of the Church.

The bishops, however, and all others constituted in the sacerdotal order, who are participating in the celebration of the ecumenical council in this city, are to apply themselves diligently to glorifying God, to offer up sacrifices, praises and prayers, to celebrate in accordance with their duty the sacrifice of the mass at least every Sunday, the day on which God made the light, rose from the dead, and poured forth the Holy Ghost upon the disciples; making, as the same Holy Ghost commanded by the Apostle, supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings for our most holy Lord the Pope, for the Emperor, for kings and others who are placed in high stations, and for all men, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, may enjoy peace and witness an increase of the faith.

Furthermore, it exhorts that they fast at least every Friday in memory of the passion of the Lord and give alms to the poor. Every Thursday the mass of the Holy Ghost shall be celebrated in the cathedral with the litanies and other prayers assigned for this purpose; in the other churches there shall be said on the same day at least the litanies and the prayers.

During the time that the sacred services are being performed, let there be no talking and idle conversation, but let mouth and mind be united with the celebrant. And since it behooves bishops to be blameless, sober, chaste, ruling well their own household, it exhorts also that above all things each observe sobriety at table and moderation in diet; and further, since there idle conversations are often won to arise, that the reading of the Scriptures be introduced at the tables, even at those of the bishops.

Let each one instruct and charge his servants not to be contentious, given to wine, disrespectful, covetous, arrogant, blasphemous and lovers of pleasure; finally, let them shun vice and embrace virtue, and in attire, in behavior and in all their actions let them manifest decorum as becomes the servants of the servants of God.

Session 4 (April 8, 1546)
Decree Concerning The Canonical Scriptures

The holy, ecumenical and general Council of Trent, lawfully assembled in the Holy Ghost, the same three legates of the Apostolic See presiding, keeps this constantly in view, namely, that the purity of the Gospel may be preserved in the Church after the errors have been removed.

This [Gospel], of old promised through the Prophets in the Holy Scriptures, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, promulgate first with His own mouth, and then commanded it to be preached by His Apostles to every creature as the source at once of all saving truth and rules of conduct.

It also clearly perceives that these truths and rules are contained in the written books and
in the unwritten traditions, which, received by the Apostles from the mouth of Christ Himself, or from the Apostles themselves, the Holy Ghost dictating, have come down to us, transmitted as it were from hand to hand.

Following, then, the examples of the orthodox Fathers, it receives and venerates with a feeling of piety and reverence all the books both of the Old and New Testaments, since one God is the author of both; also the traditions, whether they relate to faith or to morals, as having been dictated either orally by Christ or by the Holy Ghost, and preserved in the Catholic Church in unbroken succession.

It has thought it proper, moreover, to insert in this decree a list of the sacred books, lest a doubt might arise in the mind of someone as to which are the books received by this council.

They are the following: Of the Old Testament, the five books of Moses, namely, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; Josue, Judges, Ruth, the four books of Kings, two of Paralipomenon, the first and second of Esdras, the latter of which is called Nehemias, Tobias, Judith, Esther, Job, the Davidic Psalter of 150 Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Canticle of Canticles, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Isaias, Jeremias, with Baruch, Ezechiel, Daniel, the twelve minor Prophets, namely, Osee, Joel, Amos, Abdias, Jonas, Micheas, Nahum, Habacuc, Sophonias, Aggeus, Zacharias, Malachias; two books of Machabees, the first and second.

Of the New Testament, the four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; the Acts of the Apostles written by Luke the Evangelist; fourteen Epistles of Paul the Apostle, to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, to the Philippians, to the Colossians, two to Timothy, to Titus, to Philemon, to the Hebrews; two of Peter the Apostle, three of John the Apostle, one of James the Apostle, one of Jude the Apostle, and the Apocalypse of John the Apostle.

If anyone does not accept as sacred and canonical the aforesaid books in their entirety and with all their parts, 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.

Let all understand, therefore, in what order and manner the council, after having laid the foundation of the confession of faith, will proceed, and who are the chief witnesses and supports to whom it will appeal in conforming dogmas and in restoring morals in the Church.

**Session 5 (June 17, 1546)**

**Decree Concerning Original Sin**

2. If anyone asserts that the transgression of Adam injured him alone and not his posterity, and that the holiness and justice which he received from God, which he lost, he lost for himself alone and not for us also; or that he, being defiled by the sin of disobedience, has transfused only death and the pains of the body into the whole human race, but not sin also, which is the death of the soul, let him be anathema, since he contradicts the Apostle who says: *By one man sin entered into the world and by sin death; and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned.*

3. If anyone asserts that this sin of Adam, which in its origin is one, and by propagation, not by imitation, transfused into all, which is in each one as something that is his own, is taken away either by the forces of human nature or by a remedy other than the merit of the one mediator, our Lord Jesus Christ, who has reconciled us to God in his own blood, made unto us justice, sanctification and redemption;[10] or if he denies that that merit of Jesus Christ is applied both to adults and to infants by the sacrament of baptism rightly administered in the form of the Church, let him be anathema; for there is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved. Whence that declaration: *Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who taketh away the sins of the world;*[12] and that other: *As many of you as have been baptized, have put on Christ.*
Decree: On Instruction and Preaching

But since the preaching of the Gospel is no less necessary to the Christian commonwealth than the reading thereof, and since this is the chief duty of the bishops, the same holy council has ordained and decreed that all bishops, archbishops, primates and all other prelates of the churches are bound personally, if not lawfully hindered, to preach the holy Gospel of Jesus Christ. But if it should happen that bishops and the others mentioned above are hindered by a legitimate impediment, they shall be bound, in accordance with the provision of the general council, to appoint competent persons to discharge beneficially this office of preaching. If however anyone through contempt fails to observe this, let him be subject to severe punishment.

Archpriests, priests and all who in any manner have charge of parochial or other churches to which is attached the cura animarum, shall at least on Sundays and solemn festivals, either personally or, if they are lawfully impeded, through others who are competent, feed the people committed to them with wholesome words in proportion to their own and their people's mental capacity, by teaching them those things that are necessary for all to know in order to be saved, and by impressing upon them with briefness and plainness of speech the vices that they must avoid and the virtues that they must cultivate, in order that they may escape eternal punishment and obtain the glory of heaven. But if anyone of the above should neglect to discharge this duty, even on the plea that for some reason he is exempt from the jurisdiction of the bishop, even if the churches are said in some way to be exempt, or perhaps annexed or united to some monastery that is outside the diocese, if the churches are really within their dioceses, let not the watchful and pastoral solicitude of the bishops be wanting, lest that be fulfilled: The little ones have asked for bread, and there was none to break it unto them. Wherefore, if after having been admonished by the bishop they neglect their duty for a period of three months, let them be compelled by ecclesiastical censures or by other measures at the discretion of the bishop; and should he deem it expedient, let a fair remuneration be paid from the revenues of the benefices to another person to discharge that office, till the incumbent, having come to his senses, shall fulfill his own duty.

Reading Guide Questions for Excerpts from the Decrees of the Council of Trent

1. According to session 2 (how to live at the council), what should bishops and priests at the council do on each Sunday? On each Friday? How should bishops behave at table?

2. According to session 4 (sacred books and apostolic traditions), what should Catholics value as the word of God? Why?

3. According to session 5 (original sin), is original sin passed on by imitation or by propagation (through sexual intercourse and birth)? How is it remedied? According to this statement, can infants be baptized with the same effectiveness as adults?

4. According to session 5 (instruction and preaching), what is the proper role of the bishop and the priests? How often must they fulfill this role? Note: A "benefice" is a church position for which a person receives, some financial benefit. In the sixteenth century, for example, a pastor would receive the church collection from his parish for the upkeep of the church, but also for his personal expenses.