Council of Trent

Session 7 (March 3, 1547)

Canons On The Sacraments In General

Canon 1. If anyone says that the sacraments of the New Law were not all instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ, or that there are more or less than seven, namely, baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, extreme unction, order and matrimony,[1] or that any one of these seven is not truly and intrinsically a sacrament, let him be anathema.

Canon 6. If anyone says that the sacraments of the New Law do not contain the grace which they signify, or that they do not confer that grace on those who place no obstacles in its way,[3] as though they were only outward signs of grace or justice received through faith and certain marks of Christian profession, whereby among men believers are distinguished from unbelievers, let him be anathema.

Canon 8. If anyone says that by the sacraments of the New Law grace is not conferred ex opere operato, but that faith alone in the divine promise is sufficient to obtain grace, let him be anathema.

Canons On Baptism

Canon 5. If anyone says that baptism is optional, that is, not necessary for salvation, let him be anathema.

Canon 6. If anyone says that one baptized cannot, even if he wishes, lose grace, however much he may sin, unless he is unwilling to believe, let him be anathema.

Canon 7. If anyone says that those baptized are by baptism made debtors only to faith alone, but not to the observance of the whole law of Christ, let him be anathema.

Session 13 (October 11, 1551)

Decree Concerning the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist

CHAPTER I: THE REAL PRESENCE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST IN THE MOST HOLY SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST

First of all, the holy council teaches and openly and plainly professes that after the consecration of bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is truly, really and substantially contained in the august sacrament of the Holy Eucharist under the appearance of those sensible things. For there is no repugnance in this that our Savior sits always at the right hand of the Father in heaven according to the natural mode of existing, and yet is in many other places sacramentally present to us in His own substance by a manner of existence which, though we can scarcely express in words, yet with our understanding illumined by faith, we can conceive and ought most firmly to believe is possible to God. For thus all our forefathers, as many as were in the true Church of Christ and who treated of this most holy sacrament, have most openly professed that our Redeemer instituted this wonderful sacrament at the last supper, when, after
blessing the bread and wine, He testified in clear and definite words that He gives them His own body and His own blood. Since these words, recorded by the holy Evangelists and afterwards repeated by St. Paul, embody that proper and clearest meaning in which they were understood by the Fathers, it is a most contemptible action on the part of some contentious and wicked men to twist them into fictitious and imaginary tropes by which the truth of the flesh and blood of Christ is denied, contrary to the universal sense of the Church, which, as the pillar and ground of truth, recognizing with a mind ever grateful and unforgetting this most excellent favor of Christ, has detested as satanical these untruths devised by impious men.

CHAPTER II: THE REASON FOR THE INSTITUTION OF THIS MOST HOLY SACRAMENT

Therefore, our Savior, when about to depart from this world to the Father, instituted this sacrament, in which He poured forth, as it were, the riches of His divine love towards men, making a remembrance of his wonderful works, and commanded us in the participation of it to reverence His memory and to show forth his death until he comes to judge the world. But He wished that this sacrament should be received as the spiritual food of souls, whereby they may be nourished and strengthened, living by the life of Him who said: He that eats me, the same also shall live by me, and as an antidote whereby we may be freed from daily faults and be preserved from mortal sins. He wished it furthermore to be a pledge of our future glory and everlasting happiness, and thus be a symbol of that one body of which He is the head and to which He wished us to be united as members by the closest bond of faith, hope and charity, that we might all speak the same thing and there might be no schisms among us.

CHAPTER IV: TRANSUBSTANTIATION

But since Christ our Redeemer declared that to be truly His own body which He offered under the form of bread, it has, therefore, always been a firm belief in the Church of God, and this holy council now declares it anew, that by the consecration of the bread and wine a change is brought about of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood. This change the holy Catholic Church properly and appropriately calls transubstantiation.

CHAPTER VIII: ON THE USE OF THIS ADMIRABLE SACRAMENT

As to the use of this holy sacrament, our Fathers have rightly and wisely distinguished three ways of receiving it. They have taught that some receive it sacramentally only, as sinners; others spiritually only, namely, those who eating in desire the heavenly bread set before them, are by a lively “faith which works by charity” made sensible of its fruit and usefulness; while the third class receives it both sacramentally and spiritually, and these are they who so prove and prepare themselves beforehand that they approach this divine table clothed with the wedding garment. As regards the reception of the sacrament, it has always been the custom in the Church of God that laics receive communion from priests, but that priests when celebrating communicate themselves, which custom ought with justice and reason to be retained as coming down from Apostolic tradition. Finally, the holy council with paternal affection admonishes, exhorts, prays and beseeches through the bowels of the mercy of our God, that each and all who bear the Christian name will now at last agree and be of one mind in this sign of unity, in this bond of charity, in this symbol of concord, and that, mindful of so great a majesty and such boundless love of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave His own beloved soul as the price of our salvation and His own flesh to
eat, they may believe and venerate these sacred mysteries of His body and blood with such constancy and firmness of faith, with such devotion of mind, with such piety and worship, that they may be able to receive frequently that super-substantial bread and that it may truly be to them the life of the soul and the perpetual health of their mind; that being invigorated by its strength, they may be able after the journey of this miserable pilgrimage to arrive in their heavenly country, there to eat, without any veil, the same bread of angels which they now eat under sacred veils.

But since it is not enough to declare the truth unless errors be exposed and repudiated, it has seemed good to the holy council to subjoin these canons, so that, the Catholic doctrine being already known, all may understand also what are the heresies which they ought to guard against and avoid.

Canons on the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist

Canon 1. 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.

Canon 2. If anyone says that in the sacred and, holy sacrament of the Eucharist the substance of the bread and wine remains conjointly with the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and denies that wonderful and singular change of the whole substance of the bread into the body and the whole substance of the wine into the blood, the appearances only of bread and wine remaining, which change the Catholic Church most aptly calls transubstantiation, let him be anathema.

Session 14 (November 25, 1551)

The Most Holy Sacraments Of Penance And Extreme Unction (Last Anointing)

Though the holy, ecumenical and general Council of Trent, lawfully assembled in the Holy Ghost, the same legate and nuncios of the holy Apostolic See presiding, has in the decree on justification, by reason of a certain necessity induced by the affinity of the subjects, given much consideration to the sacrament of penance, yet so great is in our days the number of errors relative to this sacrament, that it will be of no little general benefit to give to it a more exact and complete definition, in which all errors having under the guidance of the Holy Ghost been pointed out and refuted, Catholic truth may be made clear and resplendent, which [truth] this holy council now sets before all Christians to be observed for all time.

CHAPTER I: THE NECESSITY AND INSTITUTION OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENCE

If in all those regenerated such gratitude were given to God that they constantly safeguarded the justice received in baptism by His bounty and grace, there would have been no need for another sacrament besides that of baptism to be instituted for the remission of sins. But since God, rich in mercy, knows our frame, He has a remedy of life even to those who may after baptism have delivered themselves up to the servitude of sin and the power of the devil, namely, the sacrament of penance, by which the benefit of Christ's death is applied to those who have
fallen after baptism. Penance was indeed necessary at all times for all men who had stained themselves by mortal sin, even for those who desired to be cleansed by the sacrament of baptism, in order to obtain grace and justice; so that their wickedness being renounced and amended, they might with a hatred of sin and a sincere sorrow of heart detest so great an offense against God. Wherefore the Prophet says: Be converted and do penance for all your iniquities, and iniquity shall not be your ruin. The Lord also said: Except you do penance, you shall all likewise perish; and Peter the Prince of the Apostles, recommending penance to sinners about to receive baptism, said: “Do penance and be baptized every one of you.” Moreover, neither before the coming of Christ was penance a sacrament nor is it such since His coming to anyone before baptism. But the Lord then especially instituted the sacrament of penance when, after being risen from the dead, He breathed upon His disciples, and said: “Receive you the Holy Ghost, whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.” The consensus of all the Fathers has always acknowledged that by this action so sublime and words so clear the power of forgiving and retaining sins was given to the Apostles and their lawful successors for reconciling the faithful who have fallen after baptism, and the Catholic Church with good reason repudiated and condemned as heretics the Novatians, who of old stubbornly denied that power of forgiving. Therefore, this holy council, approving and receiving that perfectly true meaning of the above words of the Lord, condemns the grotesque interpretations of those who, contrary to the institution of this sacrament, wrongly contort those words to refer to the power of preaching the word of God and of making known the Gospel of Christ.

CHAPTER III: THE PARTS AND FRUITS OF THIS SACRAMENT

The holy council teaches furthermore, that the form of the sacrament of penance, in which its efficacy chiefly consists, are those words of the minister: I absolve thee, etc., to which are indeed laudably added certain prayers according to the custom of holy Church, which, however, do not by any means belong to the essence of the form nor are they necessary for the administration of the sacrament. But the acts of the penitent himself, namely, contrition, confession and satisfaction, constitute the matter of this sacrament, which acts, inasmuch as they are by God's institution required in the penitent for the integrity of the sacrament and for the full and complete remission of sins, are for this reason called the parts of penance. But that which is signified and produced by this sacrament is, so far as its force and efficacy are concerned, reconciliation with God, which sometimes, in persons who are pious and who receive this sacrament with devotion, is wont to be followed by peace and serenity of conscience with an exceedingly great consolation of spirit. The holy council, while declaring these things regarding the parts and effect of this sacrament, at the same time condemns the opinions of those who maintain that faith and the terrors that agitate conscience are parts of penance.

Session 21 (July 16, 1562)

Decree Concerning Reform

Introduction

The same holy, ecumenical and general Council of Trent, the same legate and nuncios of the Apostolic See presiding therein, has thought it proper that the following canons be established and decreed.

CHAPTER IX: THE NAME AND SERVICES OF QUESTORS OF ALMS IS
ABOLISHED. THE ORDINARIES SHALL PUBLISH INDULGENCES AND SPIRITUAL GRACES. TWO OF THE CHAPTER SHALL WITHOUT FEE RECEIVE THE ALMS

Since many remedies heretofore applied by different councils, those of the Lateran and Lyons as well as that of Vienne, against the pernicious abuses of collectors of alms, have in later times become useless, and since their depravity is, to the great scandal and complaint of the faithful, found to be daily so much on the increase that there seems to be no longer any hope of their amendment left, it is decreed that in all parts of Christendom their name and service be henceforth absolutely abolished and in no wise shall they be permitted to exercise such an office; any privileges granted to churches, monasteries, hospitals, pious places, and to any persons of whatever rank, state and dignity, or any customs, even though immemorial, notwithstanding. With regard to indulgences or other spiritual graces of which the faithful of Christ ought not on this account to be deprived, it is decreed that they are in the future to be announced to the people at suitable times by the local ordinaries aided by two members of the chapter. To these also the authority is given to collect faithfully and without fee the alms and charitable contributions offered them, so that all may understand that these heavenly treasures of the Church are administered not for gain but for piety.

Session 22

Doctrine Concerning The Sacrifice Of The Mass

That the ancient, complete and in every way perfect faith and teaching regarding the great mystery of the Eucharist in the Catholic Church may be retained, and with the removal of errors and heresies may be preserved in its purity, the holy, ecumenical and general Council of Trent, lawfully assembled in the Holy Ghost, the same legates of the Apostolic See presiding, instructed by the light of the Holy Ghost, teaches, declares and orders to be preached to the faithful the following concerning it, since it is the true and only sacrifice.

CHAPTER I : THE INSTITUTION OF THE MOST HOLY SACRIFICE OF THE MASS

Since under the former Testament, according to the testimony of the Apostle Paul, there was no perfection because of the weakness of the Levitical priesthood, there was need, God the Father of mercies so ordaining, that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchisedech, our Lord Jesus Christ, who might perfect and lead to perfection as many as were to be sanctified. He, therefore, our God and Lord, though He was by His death about to offer Himself once upon the altar of the cross to God the Father that He might there accomplish an eternal redemption, nevertheless, that His priesthood might not come to an end with His death, at the last supper, on the night He was betrayed, that He might leave to His beloved spouse the Church a visible sacrifice, such as the nature of man requires, whereby that bloody sacrifice once to be accomplished on the cross might be represented, the memory thereof remain even to the end of the world, and its salutary effects applied to the remission of those sins which we daily commit, declaring Himself constituted a priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech, offered up to God the Father His own body and blood under the form of bread and wine, and under the forms of those same things gave to the Apostles, whom He then made priests of the New Testament, that they might partake, commanding them and their successors in the priesthood by these words to do likewise: Do this in commemoration of me, as the Catholic Church has
always understood and taught. For having celebrated the ancient Passover which the multitude of
the children of Israel sacrificed in memory of their departure from Egypt, He instituted a new
Passover, namely, Himself, to be immolated under visible signs by the Church through the priests
in memory of His own passage from this world to the Father, when by the shedding of His blood
He redeemed and delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into his kingdom.
And this is indeed that clean oblation which cannot be defiled by any unworthiness or malice on
the part of those who offer it; which the Lord foretold by Malachias was to be great among the
Gentiles, and which the Apostle Paul has clearly indicated when he says, that they who are
defiled by partaking of the table of devils cannot be partakers of the table of the Lord,
understanding by table in each case the altar. It is, finally, that [sacrifice] which was prefigured
by various types of sacrifices during the period of nature and of the law, which, namely,
comprises all the good things signified by them, as being the consummation and perfection of
them all.

CHAPTER V:  THE CEREMONIES AND RITES OF THE MASS

And since the nature of man is such that he cannot without external means be raised
easily to meditation on divine things, holy mother Church has instituted certain rites, namely, that
some things in the mass be pronounced in a low tone and others in a louder tone. She has
likewise, in accordance with apostolic discipline and tradition, made use of ceremonies, such as
mystical blessings, lights, incense, vestments, and many other things of this kind, whereby both
the majesty of so great a sacrifice might be emphasized and the minds of the faithful excited by
those visible signs of religion and piety to the contemplation of those most sublime things which
are hidden in this sacrifice.

CHAPTER VIII:  THE MASS MAY NOT BE CELEBRATED IN THE VERNACULAR.
IT’S MYSTERIES TO BE EXPLAINED TO THE PEOPLE

Though the mass contains much instruction for the faithful, it has, nevertheless, not been
deemed advisable by the Fathers that it should be celebrated everywhere in the vernacular tongue.
Wherefore, the ancient rite of each Church, approved by the holy Roman Church, the mother
and mistress of all churches, being everywhere retained, that the sheep of Christ may not suffer
hunger, or “the little ones ask for bread and there is none to break it unto them,” the holy council
commands pastors and all who have the responsibility for souls that they, either themselves or
through others, explain frequently during the celebration of the mass some of the things read
during the mass, and that among other things they explain some mystery of this most holy
sacrifice, especially on Sundays and festival days.

Session 23 (July 15, 1563)

Chapter I:  The Institution Of The Priesthood Of The New Law

Sacrifice and priesthood are by the ordinance of God so united that both have existed in
every law. Since therefore in the New Testament the Catholic Church has received from the
institution of Christ the holy, visible sacrifice of the Eucharist, it must also be confessed that there
is in that Church a new, visible and external priesthood, into which the old has been translated.
That this was instituted by the same Lord our Savior, and that to the Apostles and their successors
in the priesthood was given the power of consecrating, offering and administering His body and
blood, as also of forgiving and retaining sins, is shown by the Sacred Scriptures and has always
been taught by the tradition of the Catholic Church.

**Chapter III: The Order Of The Priesthood Is Truly A Sacrament**

Since from the testimony of Scripture, Apostolic tradition and the unanimous agreement of the Fathers it is clear that grace is conferred by sacred ordination, which is performed by words and outward signs, no one ought to doubt that order is truly and properly one of the seven sacraments of holy Church. For the Apostle says: “I admonish thee that thou stir up the grace of God which is in thee by the imposition of my hands. For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of sobriety.”

**Session 24 (November 11, 1563)**

**Doctrine Of The Sacrament Of Matrimony**

The perpetual and indissoluble bond of matrimony was expressed by the first parent of the human race, when, under the influence of the divine Spirit, he said: “This now is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall be two in one flesh.” But that by this bond two only are united and joined together, Christ the Lord taught more plainly when referring to those last words as having been spoken by God, He said: “Therefore now they are not two, but one flesh,” and immediately ratified the firmness of the bond so long ago proclaimed by Adam with these words: “What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder.”

But the grace which was to perfect that natural love, and confirm that indissoluble union, and sanctify the persons married, Christ Himself, the instituter and perfecter of the venerable sacraments, merited for us by His passion, which Paul the Apostle intimates when he says: 

Husbands love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church, and delivered himself up for it;[4] adding immediately: “This is a great sacrament, but I speak in Christ and in the Church.”

**Session 25 (December 4, 1963)**

**On The Invocation, Veneration, And Relics Of Saints, And On Sacred Images**

The holy council commands all bishops and others who hold the office of teaching and have charge of the responsibility that in accordance with the usage of the Catholic and Apostolic Church, received from the primitive times of the Christian religion, and with the unanimous teaching of the holy Fathers and the decrees of sacred councils, they above all 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 who reign together with Christ offer up their prayers to God for men, that it is good and beneficial supplicantly 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 who enjoy eternal happiness in heaven are to be invoked, or who assert that they do not 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 and inconsistent with the honor of the one mediator of God and men, Jesus Christ, or that it is foolish to pray vocally or mentally to those who reign in heaven. Also, that the holy bodies of the holy martyrs and of others living with Christ, which were the living members of Christ and the temple the Holy Ghost, to be awakened
by Him to eternal life and to be glorified, are to be venerated by the faithful, through which many benefits are bestowed by God on men, so that those who maintain that veneration and honor are not due to the relics of the saints, or that these and other memorials are honored by the faithful without profit, and that the places dedicated to the memory of the saints for the purpose of obtaining their aid are visited in vain, are to be utterly condemned, as the Church has already long since condemned and now again condemns them.

Moreover, that the images of Christ, of the Virgin Mother of God, and of the other saints are to be placed and retained especially in the churches, and that due honor and veneration is to be given them; not, however, that any divinity or virtue is believed to be in them by reason of which they are to be venerated, or that something is to be asked of them, or that trust is to be placed in images, as was done of old by the Gentiles who placed their hope in idols;[9] but because the honor which is shown them is referred to the prototypes which they represent, so that by means of the images which we kiss and before which we uncover the head and prostrate ourselves, we adore Christ and venerate the saints whose likeness they bear. That is what was defined by the decrees of the councils, especially of the Second Council of Nicaea, against the opponents of images.

Moreover, let the bishops diligently teach that by means of the stories of the mysteries of our redemption portrayed in paintings and other representations the people are instructed and confirmed in the articles of faith, which ought to be borne in mind and constantly reflected upon; also that great profit is derived from all holy images, not only because the people are thereby reminded of the benefits and gifts bestowed on them by Christ, but also because through the saints the miracles of God and salutary examples are set before the eyes of the faithful, so that they may give God thanks for those things, may fashion their own life and conduct in imitation of the saints and be moved to adore and love God and cultivate piety. But if anyone should teach or maintain anything contrary to these decrees, let him be anathema.

**Questions for Reading**

1. **According to session 7 (sacraments), what is a "sacrament"? How many sacraments are there? What are they? How do Christians benefit from sacraments?**

2. **According to session 13, how should the Christian understand what takes place when bread and wine are consecrated at the Eucharist? Is the whole substance of the bread/wine changed into the substance of Christ's body/blood, or is Christ present there only as in a sign or figure? Does the substance of bread and wine remain along with the body and blood of Christ?**

3. **Also in session 7, the church leaders talk about three ways of receiving Eucharist: only sacramentally, only spiritually, and both sacramentally and spiritually. Describe each.**

4. **According to session 14 (penance), what three acts on the part of the person receiving Penance are necessary for the sacrament to be valid?**

5. **According to session 22 (the sacrifice of the mass), what did the church leaders think about the mass (Eucharist) being celebrated everywhere in the vernacular, that is, in the everyday language of the people?**

6. **According to session 24 (marriage; relics and images), what three things does the grace of marriage do for the married couple?**

7. **Also in session 24, why do the church leaders say that Christians should venerate the
bodies of the martyrs and other saints who have died? Why should Christians use sacred images like statues and holy pictures?