

The Council of Trent and Catholic Reformation

Acts of the Council of Trent

(1563)

The universal Church has always understood that the complete confession of sins was instituted by the Lord, and is of divine right necessary for all who have fallen into sin after baptism; because our Lord Jesus Christ, when about to ascend from earth to heaven, left priests, his own vicars, as leaders and judges, before whom all the mortal offenses into which the faithful of Christ may have fallen should be carried, in order that, in accordance with the power of the keys, they may pronounce the sentence of forgiveness or of retention of sins. For it is manifest that priests could not have exercised this judgment without knowledge of the case....

If any one saith that the New Testament does not provide for a distinct, visible priesthood; or that this priesthood has not any power of consecrating and offering up the true body and blood of the Lord, and of forgiving and retaining sins, but is only an 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 any one saith that by sacred ordination the Holy Ghost is not given, and that vainly therefore do the bishops say, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost"; or that a character is not imprinted by that ordination; or that he who has once been a priest can again become a layman; let him be anathema. ...

If any one saith that in the Catholic Church there is not a hierarchy instituted by divine ordination, consisting of bishops, priests, and ministers; let him be anathema.

If any one saith that the sacraments of the new law were not all instituted by Jesus Christ, our Lord; or that they are more or less than seven, to wit, baptism, confirmation, the eucharist, penance, extreme unction, orders, and matrimony; or even that any one of these seven is not truly and properly a sacrament; let him be anathema. ...

It is to be desired that those who undertake the office of bishop should understand what their portion is, and comprehend that they are called, not to their own convenience, not to riches or luxury, but to labors and cares, for the glory of God. For it is not to be doubted that the rest of the faithful also will be more easily excited to religion and innocence if they shall see those who are set over them not fixing their thoughts on the things of this world, but on the salvation of souls and on their heavenly country. Wherefore this holy Council, being minded that these things are of the greatest importance towards restoring ecclesiastical discipline, admonishes all bishops that, often mediating thereon, they show themselves conformable to their office by their actual deeds and the actions of their lives; which is a kind of perpetual sermon; but, above all, that they so order their

whole conversation that others may thence be able to derive examples of frugality, modesty, continency, and of that holy humility which so much commends us to God.

Wherefore, after the example of our fathers in the Council of Carthage, this Council not only orders that bishops be content with modest furniture, and a frugal table and diet, but that they also give heed that in the rest of their manner of living, and in their whole house, there be nothing seen which is alien to this holy institution, and which does not manifest simplicity, zeal toward God, and a contempt of vanities.

It strictly forbids them, moreover, to strive to enrich their own kindred or domestics out of the revenues of the Church; seeing that even the canons of the apostles forbid them to give to their kindred the property of the Church, which belongs to God; but if their kindred be poor, let them distribute to them thereof as poor, but not misapply or waste the Church's goods for their sakes: yea, this holy Council, with the utmost earnestness, admonishes them completely to lay aside all this human and carnal affection towards brothers, nephews, and kindred, which is the seed plot of many evils in the Church. And what has been said of bishops, the same is to be observed by all who hold ecclesiastical benefices, whether secular or regular, each according to the nature of his rank. ...