

Sacramentalism grew as the general ability of the average "Christian" diminished--with regard to an understanding and study of the Bible. Following the Council of Trent (16th century) it was so firmly implanted in the church as to be virtually unchallenged. The Trent decrees also forbade the translation of the Bible into vernacular and took Bible study away from the non-cleric. Thus in the circles about Rome a sacramental theology with the church as administrator became the standard ideal.

5. Challenges in Ecclesiastical Authority

The growth of the authority of the church was not unaccompanied by some peripheral objections and some earnest schisms. These all tended to refine the process and slow it somewhat. We mention the following as ideas that tended to work against the centralization of ecclesiastical structure.

a. Montanism

Representing an immediate dependence on the Holy Spirit for new light and direction, the Montanist movement (2nd-3rd centuries) presented a test to the established order. In principle, however, the Montanist ideal of the church was even more monolithic than the normal body...in that the head of the Montanist order was the very spokesman of God. This party received direct communications from the Spirit of God and these were passed on to the body politic as the voice of truth. Absolutism prevailed in Montanism to a strong degree but the emphasis on a continuing charismata and the objections to "worldliness" in the existing body made it a challenger to the organization of that group.

b. Schism

Schism, the dividing of the body into segments, was a very powerful tool opposing the general 'understanding of ecclesiology. We cannot discuss all the schismatic ideals in this course and mention the following representative concepts.

(1) Donatism; Novatianism

These were challenges to the authority of the bishop raised after the Trajan (Novatianism) and Diocletian (Donatism) persecutions. Using the concept of a purified church as a working basis, they separated themselves from the body politic and announced a new body which was, in their own concepts, the only true church. Both were pronounced against by councils and individual Christian leaders and both eventually died...striving to keep alive an issue that was clinically dead.