

II.9.a.
Devices of
Counter-Reform

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The Council of Trent

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The Council of Trent was the most satisfactory of all the counter-reform moves. It was an enormous affair and served to redefine catholicism and give the Roman church more of a monolithic composition. In thinking of it you will want to remember the concepts of the Conciliar movement of the last century and the way in which the popes feared the conciliar idea. You will recall that Luther repeatedly asked for a council but Pope Leo, in particular, was not willing at all that one should be convened and the emperor could not do it without the consent of the pope (the agreement of the pope).

But Pope Paul III finally took action and called for a council in 1539. It could not begin till 1545 and was slated to meet at Trent. This meeting would be in effect for about 18 years--but not always at Trent--until the work of restructure and renovation was completed. The pope succeeded in having the voting at the council by delegates, not by nations. The coming of the Society of Jesus would also form the council into a more formidable voice. The only ideas of reform that the council would be able to tolerate would be those that sought mere adjustments in the outward life of the church.

The first session met at Trent from 1545-1547 and in eight sessions (well, meetings) produced the following ideological matters:

--The Bible was spoken of as trustworthy and the Apocrypha (as we know it) was added to the text and made part of the Roman profession. It was the first time this was required in the Roman system as an article of belief.

--There was an infallible, dependable tradition which was to be followed with the Bible and this tradition was being defined and enunciated by the church.

--The text of the Vulgate was to be regarded as the only authentic, authoritative Bible text.

--The sense of Scripture as taught by the church must be received by all who profess to be part of that church.