Pastoral Care

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Pastoral care was one of the most consuming and important reform issues discussed at the Council of Trent. During every session that addressed reforms to the Church, the attendees confronted issues of pastoral care. In its most basic sense, pastoral care means the provision of spiritual guidance to the flock, a key element of what any religious organization must do. But it entails innumerable facets and meticulous attention to detail. What does spiritual care look like? Who should provide it and how? What constitutes adequate or excellent care? How can it be institutionalized, monitored, and controlled? The reformers at Trent tried to answer these questions in order to ensure the Catholic Church could provide consistent and hopefully exemplary pastoral care to all of its members. This required a focus on episcopal and clerical residency, clerical education and discipline, the importance of preaching and teaching laypeople about the sacraments, the regulation of confraternities and lay devotions, and the provision of catechism instruction. Improvements in these areas, the reformers argued, would ensure that Catholics received the guidance they needed.

It is often assumed – and Protestant critics certainly claimed – that the late medieval Church was not providing these things. According to this view, the late fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Church was staffed by decadent and disinterested bishops and cardinals who oversaw ignorant or negligent priests. These clerics left laypeople to their own devices and consequently Catholics knew little or nothing of their faith. In the worst cases, according to this narrative, ignorance bred apathy. This image of late medieval Catholicism, however, is deeply flawed. The Catholic faith experienced a spiritual revival in the later Middle Ages that was still ongoing by

the time Luther criticized the sale of indulgences.[1] When examined through this lens, it becomes clear that the problem with pastoral care for the reformers at Trent was not its absence, but rather that the wrong people were providing it. Many cardinals, bishops, and parish priests were lacking in dedication or qualifications, but this does not mean laypeople were left adrift. Instead, they found other sources of spiritual care, most prominently in the mendicant orders or in other regular clergy. They also turned inwards, adopting the practices of the *devotio moderna* and following Thomas à Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*, a popular devotional text that emphasized a spiritual withdrawal from the world. Finally, many turned to lay-driven active devotions, joining confraternities or founding catechism schools.

The Church in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, then, was vibrant but not necessarily parochial. Many of the most popular practices had little to do with the institutional church or the liturgy.[2] The reformers at Trent set out to re-orient the Catholic Church, reducing the influence of the regular, especially mendicant clergy and the independence of the laypeople, in order to put power back into the hands of the secular clergy. The Council of Trent did not make substantive reforms to what constituted pastoral care, but it did try to pull devotion back inside the parish church and return control to the secular ecclesiastical hierarchy. In other words, for the council, pastoral care was about parochial control.

Recognizing that these reforms were primarily about power does not mean that successful implementation would not improve the pastoral care provided to laypeople. At the very least

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[1] For a clear overview, see Robert Bireley, *The Refashioning of Catholicism, 1450-1700: A Reassessment of the Counter Reformation* (Washington, D.C., 1999), 2–18.

[2] Bireley, *Refashioning of Catholicism*, 18.

reforms were likely to reorient and standardize that care, no mean or insignificant feat, and in underserved parishes, this could have significant implications for the laity. But scholars of the council and of the implementation of Tridentine reform must be aware of the kinds of changes the council called for and the rationale behind them, especially to understand how Catholic Reform altered the devotional lives of early modern parishioners. As Hubert Jedin wrote, "there had always been apostolic missions and pastoral care. What was new was that in the centers of power, the cure of souls gradually came to be conceived as the church's highest unwritten law."[3]

Debating Pastoral Care at the Council

Over the course of the Council of Trent, there were twenty-five distinct sessions. Of these, only fourteen included discussions of and decrees concerning reform. All fourteen in some way addressed reforms of pastoral care and worked to shift the center of power back to the secular clergy by reorienting local devotion around the parish and strengthening the diocesan administrative structure. The overarching goal of the council's reform efforts was arguably to promote better care of souls.[4] In reading the published decrees, the reforms that touch on pastoral care all seem sensible and relatively straightforward. Yet many involved debates, not generally focused on whether or not this was the best way to provide pastoral care, but rather on whether the reforms were feasible, whether they infringed on the rights of various authorities, and how they could be enforced. Early in the council's proceedings, the bishop of Capaccio, Enrico

[3] Hubert Jedin, "Catholic Reformation or Counter-Reformation?" in: *The Counter-Reformation: The Essential Readings*, ed. David Luebke (Oxford, 1999), 38.

[4] John O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 17.

Lofreddo, had noted astutely that the "Council must not on principle decree anything to which it was impossible to give effect," a restriction the reformers generally accepted.[5]

At the heart of the debates over pastoral care was the issue of residency.[6] The problem of non-resident clerics plagued the Church at both the episcopal and parochial levels. There were two primary causes of non-residency. Some clergy held multiple benefices that had obligations of care of souls (*cura animarum*), but at best could only travel between them or at worst ignore some of their territories. Other clergy simply lacked dedication to their diocese or parish, generally preferring to live in more desirable locales. This meant that the reformers needed to reestablish the importance of residency, ensuring that all parishes had a priest and all dioceses actually saw their bishops.

The issue of residency was discussed throughout the council, and the sixth, seventh, and twenty-third sessions included decrees related to it. The first and most crucial issue was episcopal residency, which reformers addressed forcefully in the sixth session. The council, "wishing to restore a very much collapsed ecclesiastical discipline and to reform the depraved morals of the clergy and the Christian people," demanded in no uncertain terms that those with control over patriarchal, primatial, metropolitan, and cathedral churches remain in their territories.[7] Bishops and other pastoral leaders were admonished that "they cannot fulfill [their

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[5] He made this remark on April 15, 1546. Hubert Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, trans. Ernest Graf, vol. 2 (St. Louis, 1961), 108–09.

[6] Bireley, *Refashioning of Catholicism*, 49.

[7] Sixth Session: Reform, Chapter 1, in: Henry .J. Schroeder, ed., *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent* (Charlotte, 1978), 47.

ministry] if like hirelings they desert the flocks committed to them and do not attend to the guardianship of their sheep, whose blood will be required at their hands by the supreme judge; since it is most certain that the shepherd's excuse will not be accepted if the wolf devours the sheep and he knows it not."[8] In the same decree, the council laid out penalties for those who failed to maintain residency. Those gone for more than six months without excuse lost one-fourth of their revenues. An absence of six more months brought the loss of another quarter, while anything beyond a year was subject to papal punishment.[9]

The importance of episcopal residency was generally accepted by the reformers, but there were still debates around this issue. They had to address the underlying causes of non-residency and discuss how it might be handled. In the seventh session, they confronted the problem of multiple benefices. The obvious solution, which the council ultimately adopted, was to declare it illegitimate to hold conflicting benefices. Although many anticipated resistance, the council declared that those clerics holding more than one benefice requiring care of souls had to forfeit all but one. They gave this decree some strength by adding that anyone who refused was to be deprived of all benefices.[10]

Even if all bishops complied with this reform and forfeited conflicting benefices, this would not ensure residency because many bishops chose to live elsewhere for other reasons. Some simply preferred more lively or familiar locales, but others did have seemingly valid

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[8] Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees,* 47–48.

[9] Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees,* 48.

[10] Seventh Session, Reform, Chapter 4, in: Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees,* 56.

reasons, such as cardinal-bishops with obligations to the papal curia.[11] In 1540, Pope Paul III had urged bishops living in Rome to observe the duty of residence, but this was met with resistance; most refused to comply.[12] The reformers knew that at least some among their ranks would oppose the residency requirement and claim papal exemption. This sparked one of the biggest debates of the entire council, which examined the nature of the episcopal office itself.[13] At the heart of the debate lay the question of whether the episcopal office and its obligations were granted and set by the pope or by God. If the former, bishops could get papal dispensations freeing them from residency requirements. However, if the reformers decided that the office was *de iure divino* (of divine law), then papal dispensations were meaningless, and bishops were obliged by God to remain in their dioceses.

This debate recurred throughout the council, as reformers struggled to come to any agreement on the nature of the office.[14] In 1562 this question dominated discussion. There were two key foundations for the arguments, one theological and the other moral. Reformers debated whether Christ had tasked all of his apostles with equal obligation to guard the Church or if that duty rested on Peter.[15] As theologians considered bishops the heirs of the apostles and the pope the heir to the throne of Peter, the former interpretation would present a strong case for *de iure*

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[11] Jedin, *History of the Council of Trent*, II, 319.

[12] Jedin, *History of the Council of Trent*, II, 102.

[13] Bireley, *Refashioning of Catholicism*, 53.

[14] Anyone wishing to explore this debate in detail should consult all thirteen volumes of *Concilium Tridentinum*, 13 vols. (Freiburg, 1901-2001).

[15] Hubert Jedin, *Storia del Concilio di Trento*, IV/1 (Brescia, 1979), 208–09.

divino. This was a contentious reading of Scripture, however, with fierce defenders on both sides. The moral argument, on the other hand, sparked less controversy. Most reformers agreed that bishops had a moral obligation to be resident and care for their flocks. The archbishop of Braga, in making the moral argument, compared the bishop absent from his diocese to a doctor who refused to care for patients, a captain who failed to direct his ship, and a general who neglected to command his troops.[16] The non-resident bishop, in other words, hardly deserved the title.

Although attendees spent countless hours debating this issue, in the end they could not agree. The decrees never equivocate on a bishop's obligation of residency, which is referred to on multiple occasions. In the thirteenth session, for example, the canon instructing bishops to reform the morals of their subjects notes that the increase in episcopal power is in part an incentive so that bishops "may the more willingly reside in the churches committed to them."[17] But in the end, the reformers could not agree on the nature of the office or the source of the obligation, partly due to conflicting theological interpretations, but also because many reformers hesitated to do anything that restricted papal power. This left the door open for individual bishops to interpret the nature of their office as they saw fit; Carlo Borromeo, François de Sales, and many other bishops adopted the position that the office was *de iure divino*, both out of a sense of dedication to their position and a desire to limit papal incursions.[18]

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[16] Jedin, *Storia del Concilio,* IV/1, 208.

[17] Thirteenth Session: Reform, Chapter 1; Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 81.

[18] Agostino Borromeo, "San Carlo Borromeo arcivescovo di Milano e la curia romana," in: *San Carlo e il suo tempo. Atti del convegno di Milano*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1986), 274–75; and Alison

Regardless of the nature of the office, however, the council had clearly established the importance of residency. The remaining issue was enforcement. The council had set clear penalties, but also needed to consider oversight. The idea that the Roman Curia could police episcopal residency was dismissed; all agreed that Rome could not be expected to keep track of far-flung bishops. But should bishops' residency be overseen by provincial synods, metropolitans, other bishops, cathedral chapters?[19] After discussing these options, the reformers decided in the sixth session that metropolitans should oversee their bishops, and in the event that a metropolitan failed to maintain residency, the most senior bishop serving under him was responsible for denouncing him to the pope.[20]

The residency of parish priests was similarly important, but easier to resolve. The same decree restricting multiple benefices applied to parochial clergy, as did the expectations of residency within one's parish. The twenty-third session directly addressed parochial clergy, noting that the same obligations and penalties already decreed in the sixth session also applied "to inferior pastors and to all others who hold any ecclesiastical benefice having the care of souls (*cura animarum*)."[21] In this case, there were no issues about enforcement, which was clearly the bishop's prerogative. In the event of a justifiable absence, any cleric with *cura animarum*, from

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Forrestal, *Fathers, Pastors and Kings: Visions of Episcopacy in Seventeenth-Century France* (Manchester, 2004), 118.

[19] Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, II, 325–26.

[20] Sixth Session: Reform, Chapter 1; Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 48.

[21] Twenty-third Session: Reform, Chapter 1; Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 168.

archbishops and patriarchs to the country curate, had to provide a suitable substitute.[22] At all costs, they must not deny the laity pastoral care. There was no room for interpretation or debate on this question.

Ensuring that the bishop and the priests serving under him all resided in their territories was a critical first step, but it only went so far in the provision of adequate pastoral care. The Church also needed to ensure that the men serving in these positions possessed the requisite education and lived up to a set of behavioral standards. In addition to requiring bishops to establish seminaries,[23] the council made specific reference to the problem of ignorant priests who were already serving, acknowledging that the Church had a problem with illiterate clergy. Any found to be illiterate were to be given time to learn, and while they were studying, a vicar would take over their duties. Bishops would deprive those who did not improve (or refused to try) of their benefices.[24] An ignorant or illiterate priest could not provide adequate pastoral care because he might struggle to say the Mass or accidentally lead people into heresy, making a lack of education intolerable. The reformers clearly believed that if they could raise the educational level of the clergy, parish priests would "create the preliminary condition for a better religious formation of the people."[25]

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[22] Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 167.

[23] Seminaries are discussed elsewhere in this volume and are thus not examined here. For the relevant decree, see Twenty-third Session: Reform, Chapter 18; Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 177.

[24] Twenty-first Session: Reform, Chapter 6. Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 141.

[25] Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, II, 99.

Education might help prevent the spread of heresy, but even an educated priest could lead his flock astray. Priests who failed to live up to behavioral or moral standards could also taint their flock. Although the parish priest had long been well integrated into the community, which meant that many laypeople were not troubled by all of their misdeeds, the reformers at Trent wanted to make the clergy a class apart. The priesthood was not simply a job, it was a vocation. In the twenty-second session, the reformers wrote "there is nothing that leads others to piety and to the service of God more than the life and example of those who have dedicated themselves to the divine ministry."[26] Priests had to be held to a higher standard, in other words, to ensure that laypeople understood what a life in service of God looked like, so that they could try to follow the same path. The decrees specifically warned priests to avoid "luxury, feasting, dances, gambling, sports, and all sorts of crime and secular pursuits."[27] This was in some ways even more important for bishops; their elevated status made their example more potent. The primary worry for the elite clergy, however, was that they might overindulge in luxury. The decrees of the twenty-fifth session reminded cardinals and bishops that "the rest of the faithful will be more easily roused to religion and innocence, if they see those who are placed over them concentrate their thoughts not on the things of this world but on the salvation of souls and on their heavenly country." They should thus consider their life as "a sort of perpetual sermon."[28]

Several sessions also focused on the issue of clerical misbehavior. The thirteenth reinforced the power of bishops to proceed against priests for certain crimes, even to the point of

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[26] Twenty-second Session: Reform, Chapter 1; Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 154.

[27] Twenty-second Session: Reform, Chapter 1; Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 155.

[28] Twenty-fifth Session: Reform, Chapter 1; Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 236.

deposing them for grave crimes and "shocking wickedness," while the fourteenth made it clear that all priests were subject to episcopal correction at any time.[29] The twenty-fifth then directly addressed a thorn in the Church's side: clerical concubinage. The decrees generally provided bishops with broad directives and left them leeway to implement reforms and penalize clerics as they saw fit, but here, as with the issue of residency, the reformers spelled out specific penalties. In a decree that addresses those who "live in the filth of impurity and unclean cohabitation," the council specifies increasingly punitive responses to priests who refuse to give up their concubines. They faced the loss of a third of their benefice and salary, then the full amount coupled with a suspension, then perpetual deprivation of benefice, and finally excommunication.[30] At issue here, of course, was not just priests providing a good example to their flocks in order to deliver good pastoral care, but also a refutation of Protestant clerical marriage. Nevertheless, clerical celibacy, like other standards of clerical behavior, was seen as critical.

A priest who lived among his flock but remained socially separated from them, privileging his clerical status over assimilation into the community, was a very good start. A good priest provided the laity with a clear example of moral behavior and devotion. This was crucial for convincing parishioners to reorient their spirituality around the parish, instead of seeking out mendicants, lay-dominated devotional activities, or private devotions. But the reformers realized that people needed more: pastoral care required active labor on the priest's

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[29] Thirteenth Session: Reform, Chapter 4; Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 83 ; Fourteenth Session: Reform, Chapter 4; Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 109.

[30] Twenty-fifth Session: Reform, Chapter 14. Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 250–51.

part. The reformers particularly focused on the issue of preaching. One of the Protestant critiques of Catholic services was that the Mass was said in Latin, a language few parishioners understood. Likewise, in some parts of the Catholic world printers could only produce the Bible legally in Latin (though vernacular translations were increasingly easy to find both in and beyond Protestant territories). The reformers held firm on the requirement that the liturgy and the Bible remain in Latin, but also prioritized the preaching of sermons in the vernacular by bishops and parochial clergy. Whereas before, this had been largely the purview of mendicant clergy, the reformers wanted this activity featured in the parish. As Nicholas Audet, the General of the Carmelites, argued, preaching was "better than one hundred pedagogues," and he suggested that resident bishops who took care to preach could "cure the plague of Lutheranism."[31]

How often bishops should preach and how that should be enforced, however, was the subject of debate. Some reformers, like Tommaso Casello, the bishop of Bertinoro, considered preaching an integral part of a bishop's work and wanted bishops to preach every day. Others adopted a slightly more moderate approach, suggesting bishops preach on Sundays and holy days.[32] But for bishops with large dioceses and therefore many tasks to complete, this seemed onerous. The question of enforcement loomed large as well; the idea of fining non-compliant bishops was proposed, but some reformers considered this excessive. Their opponents pushed back by pointing out that simply encouraging bishops to preach without any consequences for noncompliance would have little effect.[33]

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[31] *Concilium Tridentinum*, III, 315.

[32] Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, II, 103–4.

[33] Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent,* II, 106.

For parish priests, the delivery of sermons was equally crucial. Unlike for bishops, however, the problem for priests was not a lack of time. Priests already had to celebrate Mass each Sunday and feast day; no alternative commitments would get in the way of regular preaching. But the council still had concerns on this subject. The key problem for parish priests was what to do with those who were not capable of composing a coherent sermon. Reformers suggested two solutions: the Church should either publish collections of homilies for poorly educated priests to read or appoint specialized preachers to take over that part of the role as needed.[34] Either solution could solve the problem of laypeople lacking a competent preacher, but the second option raised an issue of staffing. Depending on how many priests were found incapable of preaching, this could require many dedicated preachers. Moreover, most available preachers would be mendicants, which reinforced the problem that preaching was primarily an extra-parochial activity at this point.[35] They therefore had to drop the idea of assigning preachers, at least as a long-term solution, in order to restore the balance of power to the bishop and parish clergy.

In the final decrees, the reformers stated clearly that "the preaching of the Gospel is no less necessary to the Christian commonwealth than the reading thereof," requiring that all clergy with *cura animarum* preach at minimum on Sundays and holy days.[36] No specific consequences

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[34] Jedin, *History of the Council of Trent*, II,106.

[35] As Jedin notes, most of the debates about preaching are really about the rights of the regular clergy, not about the importance, frequency, or subject of preaching. Jedin, *History of the Council of Trent*, II, 163.

[36] Fifth Session: Reform, Chapter 2; Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 26.

were laid out for those who did not; bishops faced no particular censure, and priests could be punished at their bishops' discretion. Good preaching, the decree claimed, would

> 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.[37]

Preaching, in other words, could nearly be a panacea if delivered well.

In addition to preaching, the decrees made priests and bishops responsible for providing their flocks with the sacraments in a timely and spiritually sound manner. The reformers made it clear in the twenty-fourth session that before the sacraments could be administered, the cleric must explain them clearly, in the vernacular, at a level appropriate for whomever they addressed.[38] The Church found it particularly important that laypeople understand the efficacy and nature of the sacraments. They needed to know, for example, that baptism created spiritual affinity between the infant and the families of his or her godparents. They needed to know how penance worked, and that in order to be absolved of their sins they had to repent earnestly and resolve not to commit the same errors again. They had to understand that Christ was truly present in the Eucharist, a key doctrine that differentiated Catholics from most Protestants. They had to know that marriage was indissoluble and required the freely granted consent of both parties. Finally, they had to understand the rituals and purpose of Extreme Unction. Ignorance could lead well-meaning Catholics into heresy, consanguineous relationships, bigamy, or even Hell.

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[37] Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees,* 26–27.

[38] Twenty-fourth Session: Reform, Chapter 7; Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees,* 199–200.

When they performed some of these sacraments, namely baptism and marriage, priests had to keep records. The Tridentine decrees instructed parish priests to maintain a book for each sacrament. The baptismal book had to contain the names of the newly baptized Catholic and his or her parents and godparents.[39] This would prevent repeated baptism, guard against consanguineous marriages, and could be used to prove lineage or legitimate birth as well. The marriage book required even more information. The priest had to record the names of the newlyweds and of their witnesses, the date, and the place where the marriage had been contracted.[40] This would prove not only that the marriage existed but also that it had been performed according to the canonical regulations and was thus valid. Marriage records therefore could prevent bigamy and guard against spurious requests for annulment.

Closely tied to the concern that laypeople understood the sacraments was a more general concern for lay education. Although catechism classes predated the Council of Trent, the instruction was not available all over the Catholic world. The decrees required the institution of classes everywhere; they charged bishops with ensuring that "at least on Sundays and other festival days, the children in every parish be carefully taught the rudiments of the faith and obedience towards God and their parents."[41] The decrees did not outline what this education

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[39] Twenty-fourth Session: Reform of Marriage, Chapter 2; Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees,* 188.

[40] Twenty-fourth Session: Reform of Marriage, Chapter 1; Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees,* 187. There was no notable debate over the keeping of these registers, but the decrees on marriage were the subject of long and heated debates. Hubert Jedin, *Storia del Concilio di Trento*, IV/2 (Brescia, 1981), 165–67.

[41] Twenty-fourth Session: Reform, Chapter 4; Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 198.

would look like, though reformers did discuss the issue. While it did not enter into the decrees until the penultimate session, catechism was a concern from the early days of the council. In April 1546, for example, the procurator of the proceedings, Ercole Severoli, called for a catechism to be produced in both Latin and the vernacular so that it could be taught to children.[42] The bishops of Bitonto (Cornelio Musso), Accia (Benedetto de' Nobili), and Prague (Anton Brus), among others, echoed this call.[43] Many books already existed, but there were concerns about orthodoxy, especially in the case of some German texts.[44] Ultimately, the council opted to commission a new catechism, though they did not require its use and plenty of others remained in circulation. The *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, also known as the *Roman Catechism*, was not yet complete by the end of the council in 1563, but the attendees discussed it at the closing in a decree about several forthcoming publications.[45] The book, published only a few years later, was a crucial manual for the classes children were expected to attend for roughly a decade, ensuring that priests and lay volunteers knew how to instruct them in the matters of the faith.[46]

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[42] CT I, 46.

[43] Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, II, 88; CT IX, 1013, X, 864.

[44] CT IX, 1013: 8-12.

[45] "Concerning the Index of Books and the Catechism, Breviary and Missal," Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 258–59. The Roman Catechism was first printed in 1566 as *Catechismus Romanus seu Catechismus ex Decreto Concilii Tridentini ad Parochos*. For more on its production, see Matteo Al Kalak, "La nascita del Catechismo Romano," *Revue d'histoire écclesiastique,* 112 (2017), 126–68.

[46] Bireley, *The Refashioning of Catholicism*, 123–24.

By ensuring the presence and preparation of priests, the reformers hoped laypeople would receive the spiritual guidance, sacraments, and services they needed, which they would comprehend thanks to the priest's explanations and their catechetical education. Their basic needs, in a spiritual sense, would thus be provided within the context of the parish. But in order to reclaim complete control over pastoral care, the Church also had to gain dominance over lay devotional practices. This manifested particularly as a need to subordinate confraternities. As John O'Malley has argued, these organizations "provided many, perhaps most, Catholics with their true spiritual homes and were more important in their lives than the parish church."[47] Traditionally confraternities were controlled by lay members, only involving the clergy when they needed a priest to celebrate Mass or perform other rituals. This, some reformers worried, could make them into breeding grounds for heresy, as the Church lacked knowledge of what members said or taught each other.[48]

Ultimately, in spite of the clear importance of confraternities for pastoral care, the Tridentine decrees have little to say on the topic. In the twenty-second session, the decrees clearly state that bishops have the right and obligation to visit all pious places, even if controlled by confraternities, and that the administrators of these places must make their accounts available on an annual basis.[49] This made confraternities subject to episcopal oversight in terms of

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[47] O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council*, 21.

[48] Christopher Black, "Confraternities and the Parish in the Context of Italian Catholic Reform," in: *Confraternities and Catholic Reform in Italy, France, and Spain*, ed. John Patrick Donnelly and Michael Maher (Kirksville, 1999), 7.

[49] Twenty-second Session: Reform, Chapters 8-9; Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 159.

property and finances, but did little else to bring them under parochial control. It would take several decades for the Church to assert complete control over confraternities. In 1604, Clement VIII issued the bull *Quaecumque*, that required all confraternities to have their rules approved and gave parish priests increased power over local groups.[50]

The specter looming over all of these reforms was enforcement. How could the reformers have confidence that all of these (and the other) changes called for in their decrees would actually be implemented? The answer was, by and large, episcopal oversight through pastoral visitations. Ensuring that this happened required reinforcing episcopal authority and directing bishops in the shape and frequency of these visitations. The first goal met some challenges from regular clergy, requiring decrees that made the bishop's jurisdiction clear.[51] In the sixth session, the reformers decreed that bishops and other major prelates must visit their churches as often as necessary and declared invalid anything that might hinder this task.[52] The decrees of the fourteenth session clarified that no clergy were exempt from episcopal correction, whether or not the bishop was engaged in a visitation; his authority was absolute and not time- or circumstance-bound.[53] The twenty-fifth session, which focused on the reform of the regular clergy, went even further and established that if a monastery had pastoral obligations over laypeople beyond those

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[50] Bireley, *The Refashioning of Catholicism*, 116; Black, "Confraternities and the Parish in the Context of Italian Catholic Reform," 8.

[51] Jedin, *Storia del Concilio di Trento*, IV/2, 249.

[52] Sixth Session: Reform, Chapter 4; Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 50.

[53] Fourteenth Session: Reform, Chapter 4; Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 109.

living under their roof, the parochial space and the monks acting as curates were subject to episcopal visitation and authority.[54]

The reformers generally accepted the importance of pastoral visitations, looking to the example set by pre-Tridentine bishops like Gian Matteo Giberti.[55] But they did argue about the frequency and shape of the visitations. Many bishops with large dioceses, most prominently the Spanish, criticized the requirement. Martin Pérez de Ayaala, the bishop of Segovia, pointed out that pastoral visitations took a very long time and were a heavy burden, so they should not be required too frequently. In response to a proposal of annual visitations, he suggested that biennial visitations were more than sufficient, and at least slightly more practical.[56] The final decree, issued in the twenty-fourth session, reflects this point. Bishops and other major prelates were to visit their dioceses annually or biennially. Personal visitation was preferred but "if lawfully hindered" bishops could delegate to a vicar-general or appointed visitor.[57] If the bishop or a trusted subordinate visited the entire diocese at least every other year, he could correct any problems that appeared, at least in theory.

The visitations had explicitly pastoral goals, but they also helped to centralize power. The purpose of pastoral visitations, "after the extirpation of heresies, [is] to restore sound and orthodox doctrine, to guard good morals and to correct such as are evil, to animate the people by exhortations and admonitions with religion, peace, and innocence, and to regulate the rest for the

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[54] Twenty-fifth Session: Reform of Regulars, Chapter 11; Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 227.

[55] Paolo Prodi, *Il paradigma tridentino: un'epoca della storia della chiesa* (Brescia, 2010), 34.

[56] Jedin, *Storia del Concilio di Trento*, IV/2, 206, 210.

[57] Twenty-fourth Session: Reform, Chapter 3; Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 195.

benefit of the faithful as the prudence of the visitors may suggest."[58] The bishop had to ensure his flock received good pastoral care, but he had the power to decide what was – and was not – acceptable in his diocese. The reformers' concern for pastoral care is also evident in their injunctions to bishops in the same chapter, that warned them not to become "troublesome or a burden to anyone by useless expenses," encouraging visiting bishops to be frugal and take into account the likely poverty of their parishioners.[59] They made it clear that bishops had to be a regular and authoritative presence throughout their dioceses, to ensure that no parish or community fell through the cracks and was denied the pastoral care it needed. At the same time, the visitation schedule provided for consistent oversight to ensure that bishops and parish priests maintained control over local religion.

A Post-Tridentine Model for Pastoral Care

Implementing the reforms sought by the Council of Trent was notoriously difficult and slow. Historians still debate the extent to which reforms were successful, or indeed if one can even measure the rate of success. But if one sets aside the discussion of actual implementation and accepts the goals of the reformers at face value, it is still useful to examine what a reformed Catholic Church was supposed to look like.

As with nearly all the reforms called for at Trent, the bishop stood at the center of all efforts, responsible for improving the conditions of his diocese. To ensure that educated, competent, and morally upstanding priests ministered to his flock, he had to maintain a seminary, oversee ordination, and visit all of his parishes at least every two years. To provide a good

[58] Twenty-fourth Session: Reform, Chapter 3. Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 196.

[59] Schroeder, *Canons and Decrees*, 196.

example to both clergy and laity in his diocese, he was expected to preach regularly in his cathedral, participate actively in the spiritual life of the diocese, and model appropriate behavior for everyone around him. In essence, this is the model of the pastoral bishop that Giberti had revived before the convening of the council.[60]

Serving under that bishop, the council hoped for devout and dedicated priests who were sufficiently educated to perform ceremonies properly and preach the Gospel in an engaging manner in the vernacular. Priests were on the front lines of reform: they had the task of making sure their laypeople understood the sacraments and received them when they were supposed to, that children attended catechism classes regularly and understood the material they were taught, that confraternities did not harbor heretics or create confusion, and that devotional practices were strictly orthodox. They also needed to keep precise records, and many bishops expected more than the decrees demanded, requesting that priests also keep more general accounts of the sacramental life of their parishioners.[61] Finally, they must live an unimpeachable life, so that laypeople would understand the role of the priest and see clergy as somewhat separate from the community, but also follow their example and moral leadership.

Although they did not exactly serve under the bishop, the council reminded regular clergy such as the mendicants who had pastoral responsibilities that they too were required to respect the authority of the bishop over them insofar as they served his flock. Like the secular clergy, they were expected to live in an appropriate manner. Clericalization, of both secular and regular clergy, was a key goal of the council; if laypeople could see the clergy as a different class, it

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[60] Prodi, *Il paradigma tridentino*, 34.

[61] Adriano Prosperi, *Il Concilio di Trento: una introduzione storica* (Torino, 2001), 86.

could reduce clerics' temptations to be overly familiar with their flocks and encourage laity to esteem their priests and respect their mandates. In other words, power would be restored to the institutional Church.

Finally, the council imagined a Catholic laity that would accept the unquestionable authority of the Church and the clergy. They would orient their spiritual lives around the parish church and participate fully in the sacraments and in approved devotional activities. Their choice of devotional activities would privilege corporate over private rituals; rather than praying before a personal shrine at home, they would come to church for the rosary, Forty Hours' Devotions, or other communal events.[62] They would accept parochial oversight of their confraternities and support catechism classes by both sending their own children and perhaps volunteering to teach under clerical supervision. In other words, they would view the parish as the center of their devotional lives, and seek spiritual care there, once again looking towards the ecclesiastical hierarchy rather than inside themselves.

Conclusion

Throughout the Council of Trent, the issue of pastoral care loomed large. When those in attendance considered how they might reform their Church, they looked to the diocesan and parochial structures, and saw their standardization as the key to providing sound spiritual care to all Catholics. They acknowledged problems with poorly prepared priests, clergy lacking vocation, missed opportunities to educate the laity in the faith, and the dangers of unsupervised lay devotion, and saw a reinvigoration of the diocesan and parochial space as the answer.

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[62] Abigail Brundin, Deborah Howard, and Mary Laven, *The Sacred Home in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford, 2018), 59.

Powerful and dedicated bishops could ensure good priests, who in turn could provide stellar spiritual guidance to laypeople. Only this would ensure that Catholics were nurtured in their Church and restore the balance of power.

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