

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Pope, the Council, and the Unity of the Church: The Now-Unseen Papal Ecclesiology Surrounding the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent

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Abstract

When scholars think about the Council of Trent, they generally do not remember it as a gathering that contributed substantially to doctrinal claims about the role of the papal office in the Catholic Church. This article challenges that paradigm by arguing that Trent made an indirect but decisive contribution to Catholic ecclesiology through two texts closely associated with the council: Pope Paul III's 1542 bull of convocation and the catechism commissioned by the council, which contained important claims about the pope's role as the center of Catholic unity. The relatively recent neglect of these two key sources has been among the principal factors that have led to the widespread scholarly perception that the Council of Trent, considered as a whole, had little influence on the conceptual formulation of the papal office and authority. In response, this article demonstrates that early modern publications of the Council of Trent fostered a religious culture that foregrounded the pope's unique role in establishing and preserving the unity of the Catholic Church. When the council is framed within its original historical and textual context, that is, when its decrees are read alongside the 1542 bull of convocation and the catechism issued under its name—the combined work of the pope and the council, from the convocation of Trent to the publication of its catechism—emerges as a decisive contribution to the development of the idea that the papacy was the visible source of unity in the Catholic Church.

Keywords: Council of Trent, Papal Ecclesiology, Christian Unity, Pope Paul III, Roman Catechism.

1. Trent: An Unexpected Contributor to Papal Ecclesiology

When one mentions the Council of Trent, thoughts of Church unity usually do not come to mind. Instead, this council is commonly regarded as the apex of Christian disunity in the early modern era. Despite the council's opening statement that it had been convoked for the "union of the Church" (*unionem ecclesiae*), the Council of Trent is usually perceived as one of the most divisive councils in Christian history

because of its numerous decrees excommunicating Protestant leaders and their followers and condemning Protestant teachings and practices.¹ This much was recognized by leading Lutheran and Roman Catholic contributors to recent ecumenical discussions who coauthored a document titled *The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?*² Ecumenical discussions between Roman Catholics and confessional Protestants typically mention, among the various obstacles to Christian unity, the quintessential phrase that characterized this council: "*anathema sit*"

¹Council of Trent, "Decretum de inchoando concilio, Session 1, 13 Dec 1545," in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols., edited by Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed and Ward; Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 2:660.

²*The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide*, edited by Karl Lehmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990). The divisiveness historically attributed to the Council of Trent was also noted by Robert E. McNally, "The Council of Trent and the German Protestants," *Theological Studies* 25 (1964): 1–22 at 1n 2.

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(let him or her be accursed).³ The frequent recurrence of this phrase has made the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent rather difficult to overcome in ecumenical dialogue. The general recognition of this point has been captured best by the recent Italian work on this council titled *Yesterday's Anathemas, Today's Challenges*.⁴ For many, the Council of Trent and Christian unity are diametrically opposed.

Despite the stigma of intolerance and divisiveness that continues to haunt the reputation of this council, there is yet another consideration that prevents historians and theologians from looking to Trent for any discussion on Church unity. The general assumption is that the Council of Trent is not associated with significant statements about ecclesiology. The prominent English-speaking historian of the Council of Trent, John O'Malley, conveyed as much when he explained that Trent never produced a set of decrees "on the pope." Even though the topic of the papal ministry was heavily contested by the earliest Protestant Reformers, O'Malley correctly noted, the Council of Trent never provided official positive statements on the pope's authority.⁵ At most, the Council took measures to ensure that none of its disciplinary decrees were construed as a challenge to the authority of the popes who had reigned during the council's sessions (i.e., Paul III and Julius III).⁶ Trent was unable to issue a statement about the authority of the pope and its relationship to the bishops because every time this topic came up, it threatened to derail the council's work completely. The bishops who participated at Trent's various sessions accepted papal primacy, claims O'Malley, "But just how papal primacy functioned, just what its legitimate limits might be, and especially how it related to the council itself were subjects on which there was no agreement at Trent."⁷ Nevertheless, O'Malley noted that Trent unintentionally augmented the authority of the papacy

by leaving to this office several key unfinished tasks such as the revision of the Roman missal and the Roman breviary.⁸ Readers of O'Malley's comments, however, could certainly conclude that in terms of the longer historical trajectory, the Council of Trent contributed little to the theoretical development of Roman Catholic ecclesiology, papal authority, and the unity of the church.⁹ Readers could also be led to the conclusion that with respect to the conceptual formulation of papal authority after the challenge of the Protestant Reformation, the first official conciliar, and thus ponderous, statements about papal authority, papal primacy, and the unity of the Catholic Church were not issued until the First Vatican Council (1869–1870).

This strong historical thesis, however, raises basic questions. Was it the case that the Council of Trent contributed little to the theoretical development of Roman Catholic ecclesiology, papal authority, and the unity of the church? And was it the case that the Council of Trent contributed little to the conceptual understanding of the pope's authority in relation to the bishops and the rest of the Catholic Church?

Although O'Malley is technically correct—the Council of Trent itself, that is, the bishops and legates present at Trent did little to elaborate on the notion of papal authority—this council's contribution to the question of the papal ministry and the unity of the Church, I argue, is far more complex than what O'Malley's representative description conveys. In this article, I shall argue that the Council of Trent's indirect but chief contribution to early modern theoretical discussions on Christian unity was its promotion of the belief that the papal office is the source of Christian unity. The bishops provided several statements about Christian unity such as the Council

³An essay by Roman Catholic scholar Otto Pesch attempts to explain why Trent's decrees on justification did not actually condemn the teachings of the Protestant Reformers: "The Canons of the Decrees of Trent: To Whom Did They Apply? To Whom Do They Apply Today," in *Justification by Faith: Do the Sixteenth-Century Condemnations Still Apply?*, edited by Karl Lehmann, translated and with an original essay by Michael Root and William G. Rusch (New York: Continuum, 1999), 175–216.

⁴*Anatemi di ieri, sfide di oggi: contrappunti di genere nella rilettura del concilio di Trento*, a cura di Antonio Autiero e Marinella Perroni, Collana Scienze religiose (Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna), nuova ser., 26 (Bologna: EDB, 2011).

⁵John W. O'Malley, *The Council of Trent: Myths, Misunderstandings, and Unintended Consequences = Il Concilio di Trento: miti, incomprensioni e conseguenze involontarie* 12 marzo 2013, Gregoriana 4 (Roma: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2013), 17.

⁶Council of Trent. "Decretum de reformatione in generali – Session 25, 3–4 December 1563," in *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 2 vols. edited by Norman P. Tanner (London: Sheed and Ward; Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 2:784–796 esp. ch. 21 p. 796.

⁷O'Malley, *The Council of Trent*, 19.

⁸O'Malley, *The Council of Trent*, 19.

⁹Robert E. McNally, for example, highlights one of the challenges to Paul III's infallibility by one of the bishops at the Council of Trent. See "The Council of Trent and Vernacular Bibles," *Theological Studies* 27 (1966): 204–27 at 215. Klaus Ganzer noted the claims of some French bishops at Trent that the council was superior to the pope. See "L'ecclesiologia del concilio di Trento," *Il concilio di Trento nella prospettiva del terzo millennio: Atti del convegno tenuto a Trento il 25–28 settembre 1995*, a cura di Giuseppe e Iginio Rogger, Istituto di Scienze Religiose in Trento, Religione e cultura 10 (Brescia: Editrice Morcelliana, 1997), 155–71 at 163. For the inability of the papal legates to control the council's participants, much less move the bishops to decide on certain doctrines, see William V. Hudon, "The Papacy in the Age of Reform, 1513–1644," in *Early Modern Catholicism: Essays in Honour of John W. O'Malley, S.J.*, edited by Kathleen M. Comerford and Hilmar M. Pabel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 48–66 at 49. Hudon critiques those who believe that the Council of Trent was firmly under the control of the popes. "Such control," writes Hudon in response, almost laughing at the suggestion, "would have been shocking news to prelates like Marcello Cervini (1501–1555)."

of Trent's central objective in restoring Christian unity, the rending of Christian unity by the Protestant Reformers' teachings about justification, and the role of the Eucharist as a symbol of the Church's unity.¹⁰ But its most significant contribution to the concept of Church unity, I shall argue, was its indirect support of pro-papal statements on the Bishop of Rome's role as the source of the Catholic Church's unity. More specifically, I am referring to Pope Paul III's *Bull of Convocation* (22 May 1542), which was affixed to most early modern editions of the conciliar decrees, and I am also referring to the subsequent statements issued in the council-mandated manual for religious instruction created for all Catholic parish priests, namely, *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*. Both sources are now largely forgotten. Paul III's statements are now mostly unknown because they have been omitted from most scholarly modern editions and translations of the Council of Trent's canons and decrees since the mid-twentieth century.¹¹ This is bizarre since reprints of the major English translation of Paul's bull made by H. J. Schroeder remain in wide circulation in English-speaking countries.¹² Similarly, the key statements in *The Catechism of the Council of Trent* are now largely unknown for a variety of reasons ranging from competition with other post-Tridentine catechisms (e.g., Bellarmine's *Catechism*, the *Baltimore Catechism*, and the *Catechism* of St. Pius X) to the publication of the recent *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. An awareness of these pro-papal statements and actions surrounding Trent, however, is critical for understanding early modern ecclesiological developments within Roman Catholicism. To be ignorant of these ancillary statements and actions contributing to papal ecclesiology is to be ignorant of the forces that shaped modern Roman Catholic ecclesiology.

Let us now turn to the convocation of the Catholic bishops to Trent, where the pope gave the participants in the council's first session the first and most direct statements about the role of the papacy in establishing and preserving the Church's unity.

2. Pope Paul III, Catholic Bishops, and the Notion of Unity in the Papacy

The Council of Trent's two most pertinent statements about the pope's role in establishing and preserving Church unity were not issued at the council itself. Instead, Trent's first statements about the Church's unity were made in Pope Paul III's (r. 1534–1549) two bulls convoking the bishops to gather for a council in the city of Trent (22 May 1542 and 19 November 1544) and his letter urging the Emperor Charles V to support its commencement. The bulls of convocation were intended to summon primarily European Catholic bishops to this city. Although written within a three-year span before the council's official commencement (13 December 1545), these bulls of convocation outlined the pope's vision for this ecumenical gathering.¹³ Therein Paul III provided a clear picture of his understanding of the singular nature of Christ's Church and the papacy's role in establishing ecclesial unity. Even before a word was spoken at the council, the pope communicated to all its initial and subsequent participants a definitive message in papal ecclesiology. Many of these ideas about papal authority and the pope and the council's role in reestablishing the unity of the church were already stated. Five years earlier Pope Paul III articulated these concepts in his letter of convocation for the Council of Mantua (2 June 1536), a gathering that failed to materialize. The ensuing section will be devoted primarily to these 1542 and 1544 bulls for convening the Council of Trent. But in order to understand Trent, a word or two along the way will be said about Mantua.

The first and most salient idea in this 1542 bull of convocation is that the pope is vigilant over the unity of the church. Having surveyed the perilous situation of European Christianity, he has been compelled to take action. The distressed tone of the document is that of a concerned leader, who is witnessing the rapid demise of his organization. Despite the swift and pervasive abandonment of Catholicism

¹⁰For the desire to begin the ecumenical Council of Trent for the unity of the church, see Council of Trent, "Decr. de inch. conc. Sess I, 13 Dec 1545" (DEC 2, 660.1–8); for the Eucharist as the "symbol of unity," see Council of Trent, *Sess. XIII* cap. 8 - 11 Oct 1551 (DEC 2, 697.24–26); for Trent's judgment that the Protestant doctrines of justification have been detrimental to Church unity, see Council of Trent, *Sess. VI* Proem. – 13 Jan 1547 (DEC 2, 671.1–3).

¹¹Examples of recent editions that omit these important statements by Pope Paul III are listed in note 33 in this article.

¹²Paul III, "Bull of the Convocation of the Council of Trent under Paul III," *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, English translation by H. J. Schroeder (Rockford, IL, TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., 1978), 1–10. For the English-Latin edition of Schroeder's translation, see note 13 in this article.

¹³The Latin text for the first bull of convocation is at Paul III, "Indictio concilii Tridentini celebrandi ad cal. Novembris (22 May 1542)" (CT 4/1, 226–31). See the bibliography of primary sources for the free digital version of this book. The English translation is at Paul III, "Bull of the Convocation of the Holy Ecumenical Council of Trent (22 May 1542)," *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, original text with English translation by H. J. Schroeder (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1941), 1–10 [English]; 281–89 [Latin]. For a 1960 reprint of this work with the same pagination, see <https://books.google.com/books?id=JCdqaslgvCgC>. An account of the events surrounding the opening of the Council of Trent is in John W. O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 73–76.

in Europe, the pope expresses his determination to preserve church unity. The pope continually reiterated his vigilance in this regard between the composition of the bull and the commencement of the council. Evoking apocalyptic imagery, the pope had already expressed this concern at Mantua. After refuting the Protestant heresies, reforming Christian morals, conquering Ottoman forces in the East, and converting all peoples to Catholic Christianity, the pope envisioned a future time of divine blessing. Paul III hoped that through such measures the world would unite “together in true faith, hope, and charity into the one and the same flock of the Lord” so the Catholic Christian might live soberly and justly and in a godly way and as a result expect from Almighty God the crown of righteousness.¹⁴ Christian unity, Paul III had argued, was essential for rallying Christendom against the political, military, and religious forces of the Ottoman Empire. Subsequently, in a letter to the Emperor Charles V (24 August 1544), after witnessing the bishops’ delay due largely to wars between France and the Holy Roman Empire, Paul III stated that “above all things, we must be zealous for the peace and unity of the Church.”¹⁵ A year later on 13 December 1545, the pope professed to all the Catholic faithful that he could not labor enough “for the holy universal church and the salvation of the Lord’s flock entrusted to [his] care.”¹⁶ Earlier that year, Paul III likewise communicated to the papal legates who were presiding over the Council of Trent that he was greatly hoping that the disagreements over the matters of religion might be entirely resolved and that those sheep wandering away (i.e., the Protestants and Anabaptists) might be brought back to the Lord’s flock. The unity of Christendom was at the top of the pope’s list of priorities.¹⁷

The pope’s zeal for Christian unity ultimately reinforced his claim that as the successor of Peter he is the source of Christian unity. The pope had voiced

this message in other contexts around this same time. In the bull establishing the Roman inquisition (21 July 1542), Paul III maintained that the Protestants must return to communion with the Catholic Church under the leadership of the pope.¹⁸ In a similar vein, in the 1542 bull of convocation, Paul III asserted that the source of unity is the captain of Peter’s barque (*Petri naviculam*), which is the Church of Rome. While Paul III and his predecessors (Popes Leo X, Adrian VI, and Clement VII) were at the helm of Peter’s barque, the Church had been severely tried by the storms of heresies. Assaulted by the fierce critiques of the Church’s enemies, Paul III portrays himself as the captain of Christendom (*Christianae Republicae*), whose job it is to restore the unity that had been compromised as a result of the Protestant Reformation. Alongside the challenges posed to various European countries by the Turks, the Protestants are portrayed as the storms that continue to afflict Peter’s barque.¹⁹ The entire Church is depicted here as the singular barque of Peter. At the helm of this singular ship, Pope Paul communicates to the bishops that he is still in charge. These biblical motifs of Peter’s one barque and one captain served the pope well in reinforcing the idea that the Bishop of Rome is in fact the visible head of the one true Church. Just as a ship cannot be steered without its captain, so the church cannot be ruled without Peter’s successor, the pope. In this ecclesiological model, the pope, like the captain of a ship, establishes and preserves the unity of the Church militant, even through the most difficult of times.

These claims about the pope’s role as the guarantor of Church unity rested on the notion of papal authority. By appealing to the gospel language of one flock, one barque and one shepherd, the pope not only reaffirmed his role as the source of Christian unity but also his authority as Peter’s successor. In these bulls, Paul appealed to his God-given authority, which was based largely on biblical, early Christian, and

¹⁴Paul III, “Indictio concilii Mantuae celebrandi (2 Iunii 1536)” (CT 4/1, 3.24–25).

¹⁵Paul III, ep. to Charles V, 24 Aug 1544 (CT 4/1, 366.14–15).

¹⁶Paul III, “Cum Prophetarum vox (13 Decembris 1545)” (CT 4/1, 446.13–17).

¹⁷Paul III, “Bulla Pauli III Pont. Max. constitutionis legatorum et praesidentium concilii (22 Februarii 1545)” (CT 4/1, 393.27–29).

¹⁸Paul III, “Licet ab initio,” *Magnum Bullarium Romanum*, [editores] Laertius Cherubinus, Angelus Mari Cherubinus et R.R.P.P. Angelus a Lantusca et Joannis Paulus a Roma, Tomus Primus, A.B. Leone Magno, ad Paulum IV (Luxemburgi: Sumptibus Henrici-Alberti Gosse & Soc. Bibliop. & Typograph., 1742), 1:762–64 at 762B: “Nihilominus sperantes quandoque eosdem sic seductos, tum Dei Omnipotentis misericordia, tum fidelium orationibus, ac dictorum virorum praedicationibus errores suos recognituros, & illis abjuratis ad sanctam Ecclesiam Catholicam redituros, etsi ad aliquantum different auctoritate sacri oecumenici, & generalis Concilii, quod ad id imprimis propediem celebrare sperabamus deterritos, veram, & Catholicam fidem amplexuros, & ea mediante in semitis justitiae ambulaturos fore, negotium inquisitionis haereticae pravitatis hujusmodi in hanc usque diem distulimus.” ET: “Nevertheless, hoping that those thus led astray would at some time, through the mercy of Almighty God, through the prayers of the faithful, and through the preaching of the aforementioned men, come to recognize their errors and, having renounced them, return to the holy Catholic Church—and that, even if they will be delayed by the authority of the sacred ecumenical and general Council, which we especially hoped soon to celebrate, they would embrace the true and Catholic faith and, by her [i.e., the Church’s] guidance, walk in the paths of righteousness—we have postponed until this day the business of the inquisition against such heretical depravity.” This text is also available in Paulus III, “Licet ab initio 21 July 1542,” in *Documents Illustrative of the Continental Reformation*, edited by B. J. Kidd (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), 347–50 at 347.

¹⁹Paul III, “Indictio concilii Tridentini celebrandi ad cal. Novembris (22 Maii 1542)” (CT 4/1, 226.13–14; 227.6–7).

medieval Christian traditions that were understood as favorable to the authority of Peter and his successors, the bishops of Rome. In the summons to Mantua, the pope states that he undertakes the ecumenical council and the future crusade against Ottoman forces in the name of the holy and indivisible Trinity and by the authority of Almighty God and his blessed Apostles Peter and Paul. “Which authority,” asserts Paul III, “we [i.e., I], wield on earth.”²⁰ The same language reappears in the 1542 and 1544 bulls of convocation.²¹ “By the authority, therefore,” writes Paul III, “of Almighty God Himself, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, which we also wield on earth...,” he has sought the counsel and the consent of the cardinals of the Holy Roman Church not only regarding the cancellation of the Council of Mantua but also regarding the location for the new council, the imperial city of Trent. The pope wields not only the authority of Peter and Paul, harkening back to the promises made to Peter in Matthew 16:18–19, but he also claims that he wields the authority of Almighty God. Such claims may seem audacious, but when read through papal eyes, one can see how the promises of binding and loosing made to Peter could provide grounds for papal claims. The pope rounds off these pontifications with a solemn command enjoining the leaders of the Catholic Church to gather at the city of Trent, using language characteristic of many medieval popes such as Boniface VIII (r. 1294–1303): “we proclaim, we announce, we convoke, we establish and we decree...”²² In the letter to Charles V, the pope repeatedly reminds the emperor of the authority wielded by the Apostolic See down through history. Historically, obedience to the Apostolic See has led and continues to lead to an increase of moral virtue in Christian rulers. When obedience to the Apostolic See is neglected and even rejected, it leads to disastrous moral consequences as seen, the pope insinuates, in the life of King Henry VIII. Resisting the pope is the same as resisting God. Ultimately, history has demonstrated that God has resisted those who have opposed the Bishops of Rome.²³ This is so because the pope wields God’s omnipotent authority.

As in the letter of summons to the Council of Mantua, Paul III identifies two factors contributing to Church disunity. The first was the collective sin of the Church. God’s wrath, Paul III warns, will quickly fall upon the sins of all the Church’s members. The calamities befalling Europe and the Church are the direct result of the sins committed by individual believers, the pope’s included (*peccatis nostris*). As a result of these sins, the West’s inveterate enemy, the Turks, threaten to overtake various European countries. The assault and even conquest of these Catholic countries severely test the Church’s unity. As occurred in the East, the Turks are on the brink of overcoming Western Christendom. Second, the Protestants are a major source of Church disunity. The unity of the name “Christian” (*Christiani nominis...unitas*), Paul III perceived upon his election to the papacy (1534), had been slashed to pieces by what he calls “the dissensions and the heresies of schism.”²⁴ Those who share the name “Christian” are no longer united. The pope does not openly name the Protestants here, but Paul III had the leaders of the various Protestant communities in mind. Like earlier sixteenth-century popes and theologians, Paul III concluded that the unity of Christians has been destroyed by the propaganda of Protestant leaders.²⁵

The nature of Christian unity, for Paul, lies largely, although not exclusively, in doctrinal agreement with the successor of Peter. If one wishes to stay inside Peter’s barque, one would do well to agree with the teachings professed by Peter’s present-day successor, Paul III. The storm imagery (*tempestate tantisque excitatis fluctibus*; cf., Eph 4:4) refers to the putatively false Protestant teachings. To stay in Peter’s barque, in Paul III’s mind, would mean to remain in communion with the pope because one accepts the validity of his teachings.²⁶ Lutherans no doubt objected to such charges of heresy, but they agreed with the pope in principle that Christian unity should be based upon an agreement in Christian doctrine. Where Paul III and the Lutherans differed was in the idea that true Christian doctrine would always be taught by Peter’s successor. In these present storms of doctrinal, disciplinary, and moral challenge to the Catholic Church, the bishops

²⁰Paul III, “Indictio concilii Mantuae celebrandi (2 Iunii 1536)” (CT 4/1, 3.26–30). See also Paul III, “Indictio concilii Mantuae celebrandi (2 Iunii 1536)” (CT 4/1, 2.15–16).

²¹Paul III, “Laetare Hierusalem (19 Novembris 1544)” (CT 4/1, 387.9–11).

²²Paul III, “Indictio concilii Tridentini celebrandi ad cal. Novembris (22 Maii 1542)” (CT 4/1, 230.6–7).

²³Paul III, ep.to Charles V, 24 Aug 1544 (CT 4/1, 369.3–370.3).

²⁴Paul III, “Indictio concilii Tridentini celebrandi ad cal. Novembris (22 Maii 1542)” (CT 4/1, 226.21–22).

²⁵Cardinal Jacopo Sadoletto, for example, referred to Calvin and his pastoral collaborators in Geneva as “enemies of Christian unity” (*inimicos Christiane unitatis*); see *Jacobi Sadoleti Romani Cardinalis Epistola ad Senatam Populumque Genevensem qua in obedientiam Romani Pontificis eos reducere conatur Ioannis Caluini Responsio* (Argentorati: per Vuendelinum Reibelium, Mense Septembri 1539), 3r. Needless to say, Calvin did not take kindly to these charges.

²⁶For the nautical imagery, see Paul III, “Indictio concilii Tridentini celebrandi ad cal. Novembris (22 Maii 1542)” (CT 4/1, 227.1–4).

need to recall who is still at the helm of this ship. To abandon communion with the pope would be to jump off Peter's barque and thus into the perilous storms and waves of heresy.

Within this nautical framework, Paul III portrays Christian unity as synonymous with the Church's very essence. Aiming for similar ends, the pope also strategically employed a bucolic metaphor, recalling to the minds of the bishops that the Lord truly intended there to be just one flock. In John 10, Paul III notes, Jesus predicted that there would be only one flock, even though he still intended to gather more sheep. The Church is by definition one. The assumption in this declaration is that the then-contemporary Protestants are outside this one flock and are thus outside the one Church established by Jesus Christ.²⁷ The concept of the Church's essential oneness can be seen in other documents Paul III wrote about the upcoming council in Trent and the Protestants. In his decree on the founding of the Office of the Roman Inquisition (21 July 1542), for example, Paul III stated that his objective was to bring the faithful who had been deceived by heretical perversity (i.e., the Protestants) back to "the bosom and the unity of the church" (*ad gremium et unitatem Ecclesiae*).²⁸ The Church here is synonymous with her unity.

Paul III claims to have been mindful of his personal inadequacy in addressing the doctrinal and disciplinary challenges facing the Church. He thus called to mind the actions of his predecessors (*maiores nostros*). Previous successors of Peter, he realized, had used general synods of Christian bishops for resolving the issues facing the Church in their day. Historically, the ecumenical council of Christian bishops was an instrument of Church unity. Practically speaking, the bishops would resolve the doctrinal and disciplinary issues facing the Church. As a result of this arduous deliberative process involving the work of bishops, there will be "peace, unity and concord of Christians and rulers among themselves."²⁹ The bishops, in collaboration with the papal legates, will do the work of resolving these controversies for the Church. Paul III had already articulated this message as early as his 1536 summons for the Council of Mantua.

To effect this unity, however, much more will be needed than the sole presence of the pope and the bishops. The pope notes that the spirit of Christ himself would be present in their conciliar gathering, appealing to the words of Matthew 18:20: *for where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them*.³⁰ This ecumenical gathering would enjoy the attendance of Christ himself. Christ, by the spirit of his mouth, would be able to eradicate all the dangers and trials facing the Catholic Church.

The 1542 summons of the bishops to Trent failed to produce its desired effect. As a result of wars, travel dangers, and other impediments to the convocation of this council, Paul III explained, the Council of Trent did not begin in late 1542 as he had hoped. Instead, the pope would have to wait until late 1545 to commence this long overdue council. In his second letter of summons (*Laetare Hierusalem*) published on 19 November 1544, the pope narrated that convening a council had been his objective earlier, but for political and geographical reasons beyond his control, he was unable to gather a synod in the city of Mantua (1536). The pope would have to continue to wait until nearly a decade later for the council to finally begin. Wars between Emperor Charles V and the King of France, Francis I, had greatly impeded the commencement of the Council of Trent, but their then-recent truce had now made this gathering possible. The pope reasserts most of his earlier statements about the unity of the Church. The Church has been divided as a result of serious disagreements in matters of religion (*discordiae in religionis rebus*). Not only has the unity of the church been ripped to pieces, but there are now so many disagreements and various opinions and sects throughout nearly all of Western Christendom.³¹ No other remedy would more easily resolve the religious conflicts than an ecumenical council.³² The pope again expresses his hope that the erring sheep (i.e., the Protestants) might return to the Lord's flock (note the singular), and that a moral reformation might take place among Christian people and, finally, that a crusade might be launched against the infidels (i.e., the Ottoman Turks) to deliver thousands of Eastern Christians from the yoke of Ottoman rule. The central ideas of his original 1542 vision for this ecumenical

²⁷Paul III, "Indictio concilii Tridentini celebrandi ad cal. Novembris (22 Maii 1542)" (CT 4/1, 226.19–22).

²⁸Paul III, "Licet ab initio" § Intro (MBR [1742] vol. 1, 762B).

²⁹Paul III, "Indictio concilii Tridentini celebrandi ad cal. Novembris (22 Maii 1542)" (CT 4/1, 230.44–46).

³⁰Paul III merely alludes to the text of Matt 18:20. For the Latin text, see *Biblia Integra, Veteris Et Novi Testamenti: Non Solvm Ad Hebraicam veritatem, verumetiam ad vetustissimorum ac emendatissimorum vtriusq[ue] linguae codicum fidem, multo quam antehac diligentius recognita*, [editores] Anton Woensam et Petrus Ubelius (Coloniae: [Quentel], 1529): "Vbi enim duo vel tres congregati in nomine meo, ibi sum in medio eorum."

³¹For the mention of the numerous sects, see Paul III, "Laetare Hierusalem (19 Novembris 1544)" (CT 4/1, 385.35–386.1); for his statements about the unity of the church, see Paul III, "Laetare Hierusalem (19 Novembris 1544)" (CT 4/1, 386.48–51).

³²Paul III, "Laetare Hierusalem (19 Novembris 1544)" (CT 4/1, 386.7–10).

council remained the same: the pope is the center of unity, the Roman Catholic Church is the one flock of the Lord, and the Protestants have greatly contributed to the disunity of Western Christendom. Although these initial grandiose hopes had been dashed by circumstances beyond the pope's control, the second letter of summons—with its high claims of papal authority—accomplished its mission: the Catholic bishops gathered at Trent.

Although essential for gathering this momentous council, the importance of Paul III's bulls of convocation has not been greatly discussed in some key contemporary scholarship on the papacy. Two factors account for this oversight. First, in recent times the most famous edition of the Council of Trent used by scholars, which was edited and translated under the guidance of Giuseppe Alberigo, did not include Paul III's crucial documents.³³ Despite this important omission, Alberigo's edition has become the basis for translations of this council into Italian, French, and English, and thus serves as the basis for most contemporary academic research on the Council of Trent. From the sixteenth century onwards, however, most editions of Trent's decrees published a copy of Paul III's 1542 bull of convocation. Aware of this fact, the German editors of the famous series *Concilium Tridentinum* observed that the 1542 bull had been published "a million times" in the editions of the canons and decrees of the Council of Trent.³⁴ Vernacular translations made from Alberigo's edition have provided the standard scholarly text for the Council of Trent.³⁵ Despite the centuries-old inclusion of the bulls promulgated by Pope Paul III and his legates, European and English-speaking scholars now easily come under the false impression that Trent was hardly associated with papal claims. For earlier scholars however, Paul III's papal bulls and their weighty claims served as the entrance to this council. Alberigo's edition has unintentionally closed this papal gate altogether.

Second, some scholars have failed to discuss the significance of the grandiose claims in the bulls

written by Pope Paul III because they have restricted their attention to the actual decrees issued by the Council of Trent itself. With this limited lens, some scholars have failed to appreciate Trent's impact on the growth of papal authority through the centuries as a result of Paul III's 1542 bull of convocation. The Jesuit Klaus Schatz, for example, did not discuss Paul III's statements in his discussion of the Council of Trent and the development of papal primacy.³⁶ Instead, Schatz concentrated on the actual concept of papal authority as it was discussed during the conciliar sessions and the unintended growth of its prestige as a result of Trent's delegation of important tasks to the pope and the Roman Curia. The tense discussions over the relationship between papal primacy and the episcopate, writes Schatz, proved to be a divisive point at the council. But on a practical level, the papacy gained authority as a result of the Council of Trent because the pope collaborated with other bishops in producing the needed reforms of the Church.³⁷ Schatz presents a tension between the theoretical perception of the papacy, on the one hand, and the practical influence of the same institution, on the other. This dichotomy between the theoretical impasse over the papacy and its unintended growth and prestige, although, technically speaking, correct, constitutes a limited picture of what the Council of Trent (bulls of convocation included) was perceived as conveying about the papal ministry and its function as the guarantor of Christian unity within the universal church.

The 1542 papal bull of convocation, however, is critical for two reasons. First, even before the council met for any formal sessions, Pope Paul III in no uncertain terms communicated to the bishops that he was in charge not only of the council but also of the Catholic Church. All those who wished to be part of Christ's one true flock, the 1542 bull assumed, needed to remain in communion with Peter's successor. Paul III presupposed that he possessed the true doctrine of the faith and that if the bishops wished to understand the truth about the controverted doctrines, it was

³³*Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta*, curantibus Josepho Alberigo, Josepho A. Dossetti, Perikle P. Joannou, Claudio Leonardi, Paulo Prodi, consultante Huberto Jedin (Bologna: Istituto per le Scienze Religiose, 1972); *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, edited by Norman P. Tanner, 2 vols. (London: Sheed and Ward; Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 2:39–74; *Les conciles œcuméniques*, t. II-2: Les décrets: Trente à Vatican II, sous la dir. de Giuseppe Alberigo, Le magistère de l'Église, 3e éd. (Paris: les Éditions du Cerf, 1994).

³⁴Stephanus Ehses, "Notae n. 184" (CT 4/1, 226): "Typis sexcenties expressa, praesertim in omnibus canonum et decretorum Tridentinorum editionibus, quarum praecipuam, illam sc. ab Aemilio Ludovico Richter et Friderico Schulte anno 1853 Lipsiae procuratam, in adnotationibus litteris RS significabimus." ET: "Printed a million times, especially in all editions of the canons and decrees of Trent; of these, the principal one—namely, that edited by Aemilius Ludwig Richter and Friedrich Schulte at Leipzig in 1853—we shall designate in the notes by the letters RS."

³⁵One example is provided by O'Malley, *Trent*, 289–323.

³⁶Klaus Schatz, *Papal Primacy: From Its Origins to the Present*, translated from German by John A. Otto and Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 128–31.

³⁷Schatz, *Papal Primacy*, 129–30.

necessary that they ultimately agree with him. His ministry within the church is that of convening the ecumenical councils of bishops in order to protect Christ's one flock from the storms of false doctrine.

Second, these bulls convoking the council are important because near the end of the 1542 bull of convocation, Paul III fortified the authority of his bull by issuing a solemn injunction warning everyone not to violate or oppose its contents. If anyone dares to do so, warned Paul III, they will incur the wrath of Almighty God and the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul.³⁸ With such language he told the prelates, scholars, and laity that the pope was still the visible head of the Catholic Church and the visible foundation of its unity. If anyone wishes to challenge this idea, they should know that divine and apostolic wrath will befall them. All should know that the pope can speak thus because in a unique way he exercises this conjoint apostolic authority.

The historical theologian Kenneth Hagen once encouraged all students of Martin Luther's theology to read his biblical commentaries—and, for that matter, all his writings—in their early modern editions. Reading sixteenth-century editions, he believed, would radically reshape the way anyone perceived Luther. Instead of viewing Luther as a precursor to the modern exegesis of the Bible, argued Hagen, early editions would help contemporary readers see Luther for who he truly was: a friar in the Augustinian tradition and a late medieval biblical commentator.³⁹ The same approach should be taken toward the Council of Trent. Readers of the Council of Trent should study the decrees according to their sixteenth-century Latin editions, which were almost always accompanied by Paul III's 1542 papal bull. When prefaced with that bull of convocation issued by Paul III, his letters to Charles V, or other relevant papal documents, one's perception of the Council of Trent must of necessity change. For most early modern readers who could access the Latin text, Trent, if anything, was a papal council. Far from being a quarrelsome lot of bishops uncertain about the relationship between the pope and the rest of the episcopate, the decrees of the first and subsequent sessions when taken in tandem with Paul's 1542 bull of convocation appear in a very different light.

3. Significant Attendance: Catholic Bishops, Lutheran Leaders, and the Theological Implications of Attending the Council

Although the pope certainly entertained an elevated view of his own role in establishing the unity of the Church, one might object that such statements do not prove that the bishops gathered at Trent also shared similar sentiments. Even if the bishops attended the Council of Trent, one might argue, it did not therefore follow that the bishops actually endorsed the idea that the pope was the source of the Catholic Church's unity.

To get some perspective on this potential objection, it would be helpful to compare the actions of Catholic bishops at Trent mentioned above with their Protestant counterparts. Rather than cite the vitriolic statements of Martin Luther, which one might dismiss as extreme and thus not representative of most Lutheran leaders, it would be best to provide the words of another spokesman for the Lutheran movement, Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560). Of all the early Lutheran theologians, Melanchthon ranked among the more ecumenical and even-keeled leaders of Lutheranism. For this and other reasons, Melanchthon was selected to represent the Lutheran cause at the Diet of Augsburg (1530). Melanchthon, for example, although opposed to the concept of papal primacy as outlined by Martin Luther's *Smalcald Articles* (3 Jan 1537), allowed for the possibility that the pope could hold a certain primacy over other bishops among the Christians over whom he had jurisdiction, provided of course the pope adhered to the true gospel.⁴⁰ Despite his greater optimism toward the papacy than that held by his fellow Lutheran colleagues, Melanchthon voiced resolute opposition to the prospect of attending the 1537 Council of Mantua proposed by Pope Paul III.⁴¹ Melanchthon provided the following rationale explaining why he and other Lutheran leaders refused to attend:

With reason, therefore, we are suspicious of this synod because the pope in the [bull of] convocation did not show that he was going to grant the decision to impartial men. But rather, he clearly calls on his own men so that we may understand what sorts of processes he would like to establish. Although he constitutes [just] one side of the debate, he would like to be the judge. If we were to acquiesce to this

³⁸Paul III, "Indictio concilii Tridentini celebrandi ad cal. Novembris (22 Maii 1542)" (CT 4/1, 231.9–12).

³⁹Kenneth Hagen, *Luther's Approach to Scripture as Seen in His "Commentaries" on Galatians, 1519–1538* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1993).

⁴⁰Philipp Melanchthon apud Martin Luther, *Articuli Smalcaldici* XV (ed. F. Bente and W.H.T. Dau p. 500).

⁴¹More discussion on Melanchthon's other statements about the Lutheran refusal to attend the Council of Mantua is in McNally, "The Council of Trent and the German Protestants," 12.

convocation, afterwards, our consent would be regarded as if we had already made him our judge, and as if we had agreed with this gathering of his men. And our consent would be regarded as if we had allowed this man to set up the processes and the form of adjudicating the case.⁴²

Melanchthon's rationale for the Lutheran refusal to attend the council is clear: the pope is a tyrant. Melanchthon complained that in the pope's bull of convocation to Mantua—which contained the same papal ecclesiology as the two bulls convoking the Council of Trent—Paul III made no attempt to hide the fact that he would be the final judge. The attendance of Lutheran leaders would constitute a recognition of papal supremacy over the Catholic Church. To attend the council according to the terms outlined by the bull would be to acquiesce to all its claims for the papacy, such as the pope's exercise of God's authority on earth, the pope's role in establishing unity by eliminating heresies (i.e., Lutheran teachings), and the idea that the community united to the pope is in fact the one true flock of the Lord, and, thus, by implication that the Lutheran community is not. A true and equitable conciliar meeting would involve a third-party arbiter other than the pope and his supporters. The very fact that the pope would be the judge at this meeting ruled out any possibility for a fair hearing for the Lutheran side. Not surprisingly, neither Melanchthon nor most of his Lutheran colleagues (Martin Luther included) expressed any desire to attend the proposed Council of Mantua. Neither did they attend any of the early proposed meetings for the Council of Trent in the 1540s.⁴³ In the eyes of these Lutheran leaders, the papal ecclesiology that undergirded these proposed conciliar gatherings was nothing short of tyranny over the Catholic Church.

In stark contrast to the Lutheran rejections of the pope as the foundation for the unity of the Church stands the counterexample of Roman Catholic bishops. Even though the council fathers of Trent never articulated an explicit position about the pope's prerogative in establishing and preserving the unity of the Catholic church, by their very actions they demonstrated this to

be the case. By agreeing to participate in the council itself, Catholic bishops implicitly acknowledged the pope's role as the visible head of the Christian Church. The bishops came to Trent at least outwardly accepting the ecclesiological claims expressed in Pope Paul III's bulls of convocation. Historically, ecumenical councils have been asked to resolve significant matters of disagreement concerning doctrine. By agreeing to convene in the city of Trent, the bishops implicitly recognized that the popes had the prerogative to safeguard Church unity. Pope Paul III's vision of ecclesiological unity articulated in these papal bulls was in principle accepted by all Catholic bishops who attended the council and all subsequent Catholic bishops who accepted the authority of Trent's decrees. In short, the bishops, to borrow the words of John O'Malley, "believed in papal primacy."⁴⁴

The bishops accepted the proposition that the pope had the right to convene a Christian council. Luther and other Protestants had vociferously challenged the pope's right to do any such thing. Historically, they had argued, it was the emperors, not the popes, who had convened the ecumenical councils. The popes, they noted, played a minimal role in the first ecumenical councils of the church. Christendom should do no differently today. By accepting the pope's relatively recent claim to convoke an ecumenical council, argued the Protestant leaders, Roman Catholic bishops acted against the testimony of ecclesiastical tradition and history.⁴⁵ Roman Catholic bishops who convened at Trent did not accept the conclusions drawn from the Lutherans' historical arguments. By agreeing to attend the council under the presidency of the pope's three legates, the bishops implicitly acknowledged the pope's authority to call and govern a council in this manner.

The idea that the pope established and preserved Christian unity was presented at the Council of Trent. The council fathers agreed to allow the pope to govern the council vicariously through his three legates at all the sessions. Although individual decisions given by the legates were objected to at various times, the overall assumption was that the legates had legitimate authority to preside over the council in the name of

⁴²Philippus Melanchthon, *Causae, quare Synodus indictam a Romano Pontifice Paulo III. recusarint* (CR 3, 320): "Iure igitur suspecta est nobis haec synodus, quia Papa in indictione non ostendit, se iudicium permissurum esse non partialibus, imo vocat suos diserte, ut intelligamus, quales processus velit instituire. Ipse cum sit pars, volet esse iudex. In hanc indictionem si consentiremus, postea interpretaretur nostrum consensum, quasi nos ipsum iam fecissemus iudicem, et in hunc coetum suorum, quem convocat, consensissemus, huic permisisset, ut processus et formam iudicii constitueret."

⁴³For discussion of this point, see McNally, "The Council of Trent and the German Protestants," 17.

⁴⁴O'Malley, *The Council of Trent: Myths, Misunderstandings, and Unintended Consequences*, 17.

⁴⁵Ioannes Fredericus et Philippus Landgravius Hassiae (John Frederick and Philip of Hesse), "*Responsum principum et oratorum civitatum Lutheranarum*" (CT 4/1, 77.10–12). These Lutherans drew up a laundry list of objections and rebuttals to claims in favor of papal authority, primacy, and the necessity of communion with the pope. See Lutheran Theologians, "Articuli Smalcaldici," *Triglott Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, German – Latin – English [edited by Friedrich Bente and William H. T. Dau] (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 503–29.

the pope. Such a fundamental assumption was never accepted by Protestant leaders. The very idea that a single bishop could preside over other bishops as their spiritual head and ultimately overturn their decisions, if necessary, was in principle unacceptable.

“The history of the Council of Trent,” Hubert Jedin correctly concluded, “begins with the triumph of the Papacy over the Reform councils.”⁴⁶ Although Jedin intended the statement to refer to the papacy’s victory after the Great Western Schism in the fifteenth century, his words are equally applicable to the decade before the first session of the Council of Trent. Given the terms outlined in Paul III’s bulls of convocation, the very commencement of the Council of Trent marked an enormous victory for the papacy’s claim not only to wield God’s authority on earth but also to sustain the unity of the church. In traveling to Trent, the bishops outwardly accepted the pope’s ecclesiology of unity in the papacy.

4. Trent’s Dissemination of the Notion of Ecclesial Unity in the Papacy

Conciliar texts, because they were written in Latin, tend to have a specialized and thus limited readership. With the Council of Trent, as with most other previous ecumenical councils, this was certainly the case. In the decades and centuries after the Council of Trent, information about Trent’s decisions was not disseminated to the faithful primarily through its decrees. That vehicle of dissemination was reserved for a text that was arguably Trent’s most innovative solution to Christian catechesis, the *Roman Catechism*, or as it became more widely known, *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*.

The Council of Trent indirectly made one of the greatest contributions to the notion of the pope’s role in the unity of the Church in the history of modern Catholicism, but not through its decrees. Although the council itself did not articulate direct statements about the pope’s place in the unity of the Church, it sanctioned the production of a catechism which did that very thing.

In the space of several paragraphs, the *Catechism* defined the church’s unity primarily in relationship to

the papacy. The *Catechism* addressed the question of the unity of the church in its exposition of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. In the article, “I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church,” the *Catechism* discussed ecclesial unity under the rubric of the “four notes of the church.” In discussing the unity of the Church, the authors of the *Catechism* wasted no time in addressing a central controversial topic of the Reformation, namely the source of the Church’s unity. Following the sequential order, the authors treated the unity of the Church first. After providing an initial paragraph about the Church’s unity in the spirit, faith, and hope, the *Catechism* went directly into the major ecclesiological controversy of the sixteenth century, namely, the place of Peter’s Chair within the universal church.

Its director and governor is likewise one. Christ is indeed invisible, the one whom the eternal Father has appointed as head over the entire Church, which is his body. Now, that man is visible who, being the legitimate successor of Peter, the leader of the Apostles, holds the Roman Chair. That was the unanimous (*consentiens*) view and judgment of all the fathers concerning this man: this visible head was necessary for establishing and preserving the unity of the church.⁴⁷

After making these large claims for the authority of the papal office, the *Catechism* contended that the visible head itself is the primary means Christ instituted for ensuring Church unity. There is a parallel between the governance of the church in heaven and on earth. Just as there is one invisible head over the Church, Jesus Christ, so too there is a visible head, the pope, who is the successor of Peter. The pope is not only the successor of Peter but also the Vicar of Christ on earth. As the Vicar of Christ, he represents Christ to the entire church, ruling as its visible head.

The *Catechism* then substantiated this claim by appealing to the Scriptures and Christian history. Using many of the texts later called upon by the First Vatican Council, the *Catechism* references the traditional biblical texts used to establish papal authority. Through the claims and biblical interpretations offered by the early Christian Fathers,

⁴⁶Hubert Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, 2 vols., translated by Dom Ernest Graf (St. Louis, MO: Herder, 1961), 1:1.

⁴⁷*Catechism of the Council of Trent*, “De Symbolo” art. IX, pars I, cap. 10 in *Catechismus Romanus: seu Catechismus ex decreto concilii Tridentini ad Parochos Pii quinti pont. max. iussu editus*, editioni praeiit Petrus Rodriguez, Eam instruendam atque parandam item curauerunt Ildephonsus Adeva, Franciscus Domingo, Radulfus Lanzetti et Marcellus Merino (Roma: Libreria Editrice Vaticana; Pamplona [Spain]: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, S.A. 1989), 119.154–60: “Unus est etiam eius rector ac gubernator, invisibilis quidem Christus, quem aeternus Pater dedit caput super omnem Ecclesiam, [113] quae est corpus eius; visibilis autem is qui Romanam cathedram Petri apostolorum Principis legitimus successor tenet. | De quo fuit illa omnium Patrum ratio et sententia consentiens: hoc visibile caput ad unitatem Ecclesiae constituendam et conservandam necessarium fuisse.”

the *Catechism* argues that in the Scriptures Christ constituted Peter and his successors as the visible head of the Church. Through these patristic authors, the *Catechism* presents what it regards as the correct interpretation of classical Petrine and Christological texts such as Matthew 16:18, John 20:21–22, and 1 Corinthians 3:11. With these passages, the *Catechism* tries to show that the papacy has its foundations in Christ's promise to Peter to be the rock upon which he would build his Church. The patristic authors cited identify the rock as Peter, the Roman See, and, ultimately, Christ, who is the source of strength for the papal and ecclesial foundation. As presented by the *Catechism*, if properly understood, none of these interpretations of the rock need contradict one another.

The *Catechism* claims that it was the unanimous teaching of the Fathers that the papacy was (and still is) necessary to establish and preserve the unity of the Church. Unity without the papacy is inconceivable. A handful of Christian authors from the second through fifth centuries are cited to prove this point: four distinctly Western leaders (Jerome, Cyprian, Optatus and Ambrose of Milan), one Greek (Basil of Caesarea), and one leader who bridged East and West (Irenaeus of Lyons).⁴⁸ Like other portions of the work, the *Catechism* does not attempt to provide an exhaustive list of patristic testimonies. Instead, the work presents the most representative authors who address specific aspects of ecclesial unity in the papacy.

A discussion of all these patristic texts goes beyond the scope of this article, but following the example of the *Catechism*, let us examine the most cogent patristic testimony to Christian unity in the papacy—Jerome of Stridon (ca. 347–ca. 420). Writing to Pope Damasus (r. 366–384), Jerome exclaimed that the Chair of Peter is the rock upon which Christ built his Church, the rock against which the gates of hell would never prevail (Mt 16:18). Communion with the successor of Peter, claimed Jerome, is thus necessary for salvation.⁴⁹ Reinforcing this point with imagery from the Passover recorded in Exodus, and perhaps making an allusion to the Eucharist, Jerome claimed that whoever ate the lamb outside this house was profane. He then compared the Chair of Peter to the ark of Noah, outside which everyone perished.⁵⁰ With Jerome's testimony and other early Christian authors, the *Catechism* confidently claimed that all the fathers

believed that for the sake of salvation it was necessary to be in communion with the papacy.

Emboldened by Jerome, the Tridentine *Catechism* addresses counterarguments to the idea that Peter is the visible head of the church. The *Catechism* draws a parallel between Christ's invisible role as minister of the sacraments and his use of human beings as visible ministers of the sacraments. The rationale for this position is that a visible church needs a visible head. Because of this practical need, Christ appointed Peter as the head and pastor of the entire faithful when he told him in the strongest terms to feed his sheep (Jn 21:15–17). Christ did this so that the man who would succeed Peter would clearly have the same power of ruling and governing the entire church.⁵¹ The *Catechism* here proposes an exegesis of the Gospel of John used by popes since at least the fifth century. The ultimate objective of all these interpretations is to establish from the text of Scripture the authority of the pope and the ministry of securing unity in the successor of Peter.

One might be tempted to conclude that the *Catechism's* statements about the papal ministry within the unity of the church were nothing more than an imposition of a select group of theologians who were commissioned by the pope with the task of composition. One could argue that the Tridentine fathers themselves were indifferent to or perhaps even skeptical of such claims about the role of the papacy in establishing and preserving the unity of the church. After all, one might reason, why did the council fathers not issue such decrees?

An incident at the seventeenth session of the Council of Trent (18 Jan 1562) illustrates the extent to which Catholic bishops at Trent accepted the necessity of the papacy for Church unity. At least one council father appealed to Jerome's words to Damasus on the unity of the church in the papacy cited in the *Catechism*. In a speech before the council's participants, Gasparro Ricciullo del Fosso (1496–1592), Bishop of Reggio (Calabria) argued that the Protestants had fallen away from the unity of the church. The papacy's role in establishing and preserving the unity of the church, he argued, had a basis in the traditional New Testament Petrine texts (Mt 16:18, Lk 22:31–32, and Jn 20:21–22). Heretics seek to defame the head of the Church, argued Gasparro, so that the Church's unity may be

⁴⁸Catechism of the Council of Trent, *De Symbolo* Art. IX Pars I, cap. 10 (ed. Rodriguez p.110.161–112.188).

⁴⁹Catechism of the Council of Trent, *De Symbolo* Art. IX Pars I, cap. 10 (ed. Rodriguez p.110.161–168) citing Jerome, *Adv. Iov.* lib. I cap. 26 (PL 23, 258D).

⁵⁰Jerome, *ep.* 15.2 – to Pope Damasus (CSEL 54, 63.17–64.4).

⁵¹Catechism of the Council of Trent, *De Symbolo* Art. IX Pars I, cap. 10 (ed. Rodriguez p.112.189–200).

undone. Attacks on the papacy were the quickest way to destroy the unity of the Catholic Church. Heretics have no problem with saying that Christ or Peter's faith is the rock of the church. No heretic, however, is willing to concede that Peter and his successors are the rock of the church. The witness of Jerome supplied the basis for Gasparro's chief argument. Jerome defended the idea that Peter and his Chair are the rock of the Church. As proof of the papacy's role as the rock, argued Gasparro, many other famous episcopal sees, although ancient, have failed to preserve Christian doctrine. The Chair of Peter, however, has never failed. History, in Gasparro's mind, bore witness to the veracity of Christ's claims that the Chair of Peter remains the rock against which the gates of hell will never prevail.⁵²

There is no record of any open objection to Gasparro's statements. Contrast this lack of opposition with the physical confrontation between Bishop Tommaso Sanfelice (from Chrionissa) and Bishop Dionisio de Zanettini (from Melopotamos), the most memorable conflict at Trent. Bishop Sanfelice delivered two speeches affirming a certain doctrine of justification by faith alone (July 5 and 17, 1546).⁵³ His statements so appalled Bishop Zanettini that the latter muttered under his breath that Sanfelice was nothing more than a knave or a fool. Outraged, Sanfelice walked over and stood face to face with Zanettini. Zanettini repeated himself and Sanfelice grabbed Zanettini's beard and shook him violently. Even more incensed, Zanettini then shouted loudly that Sanfelice was either a knave or a fool. The two men were separated by the council participants. This unforgettable incident shows just how heated debates could become at Trent.⁵⁴ Gasparro, however, never met such hostile resistance for arguing that the papacy established and preserved the unity of the Church. Even though the council never moved to offer such decrees, by allowing Gasparro and others to express such sentiments without opposition, the bishops tacitly accepted or tolerated the papal ecclesiology later codified in the *Catechism*.

Before concluding, the bishops at the Council of Trent (11 November 1563) requested that a general catechism be created for the purpose of instructing the faithful. Trent also requested that this future catechism be translated into the vernacular languages throughout the world. Their wish was fulfilled. In 1566, the *Catechism* was published in Latin, whence translations were made into vernacular languages. The Catechism in its Latin original and vernacular translations went through numerous printings from the second half of the sixteenth century to the nineteenth century. The last English translation of this document was made in the first quarter of the twentieth century.⁵⁵

Through the ages the popes made grand claims about their authority in encyclical letters, papal bulls, and apostolic constitutions. The reach of these documents was at times limited because they were composed in Latin and intended primarily for prelates. But Trent's *Catechism* gave papal claims their widest distribution. This catechism was created primarily for parish priests, who would in turn communicate its contents to their parishioners. In its pages, every lay Catholic could access, at least potentially, not only the Catholic Church's position on the critical issues of the day but also the rationale for that position. The Catechism's key statements about the pope's role in sustaining the unity of the church were accessible to all the Catholic faithful who either heard its contents expounded or read it in a vernacular translation. Given its broad distribution and definite accessibility, the *Catechism* issued the most widely received magisterial statements about the pope's role in establishing the unity of the Church before the First Vatican Council.

5. Conclusion

John O'Malley has encouraged students of the Council of Trent to make the proper distinction suggested years ago by the Italian scholar Giuseppe Alberigo: Trent and Tridentine.⁵⁶ This distinction holds that there is a substantial difference between what the Council of Trent actually decreed and how its decrees were later

⁵²Gasparro Ricciullo del Fosso, *Oratio* - 18 Jan 1562 (Le Plat 1:313–15).

⁵³These speeches are in CT 5, 294–296; CT 5, 352–354.

⁵⁴For a brief synopsis of this event, see O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council*, 109. A longer treatment is in Hubert Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, 2:189–193.

⁵⁵For the decree enjoining the production of the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* and its translation, see Council of Trent, *Sess. XXIV can. 7* - 11 Nov 1563 (DEC 2, 764). A brief history of the *Catechism*'s process of composition is also in Joseph Wilhelm, "Roman Catechism," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, edited by Charles G. Herbermann (New York, NY: Robert Appleton Company, 1912), 13:120–21. More discussion on the Catechism is in Robert I. Bradley, *The Roman Catechism in the Catechetical Tradition of the Church: The Structure of the Roman Catechism as Illustrative of the "Classic Catechesis"* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990). For the twentieth-century English translation of the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, see *Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests, Issued by Order of Pope Pius V*, translated by John A. McHugh, O.P. and Charles J. Callan, O.P. (New York, NY: Joseph F. Wagner, Inc., 1923). Various publishers issued several reprintings of this text throughout the twentieth century.

⁵⁶O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council*, 11.

understood and implemented. Students of the council would do well to keep this distinction in mind when studying the council and its complex reception. But in the case of understanding how the concept of Church unity in the papacy developed in the Catholic Church, Alberigo's distinction is not helpful. It is not until students read early modern editions of the Council of Trent's decrees, which were preceded by Pope Paul III's bulls of convocation, and the Catechism it commissioned that they can begin to identify the papal orientation of this council. When students re-read the council's decrees alongside its original papal letters of convocation and its later *Catechism*, the Council of Trent truly becomes what Hubert Jedin referred to as the ultimate "Victory of the Papacy."⁵⁷ Far from leaving the question of the pope's role unanswered, these two powerful documents connected to the Council of Trent addressed the major ecclesiological questions of the sixteenth century: Which ecclesial office unites the Church? In which Church does the Christian find salvation? What is the pope's role with respect to the Church's unity? Must one remain in communion with the successor of Peter in order to be saved? When readers bear in mind the aforementioned pro-papal statements issued immediately before and after the council, the answer to those questions was unmistakable: the Church and the Christian find unity and salvation in communion with Peter's successor, the Bishop of Rome.

6. References

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⁵⁷Hubert Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, 1:5. The wording comes from Jedin's title to the opening chapter of this book, "Der Sieg des Papsttums über die Reformkonzilien," that is, the "Victory of the Papacy over the Reform Councils." See Hubert Jedin, *Geschichte des Konzils von Trient. Bd. 1, Der Kampf um das Konzil*, Zweite Auflage (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 1951), 3.

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