

a fact. Infinite pains were employed to summon together all the bishops of the world, and repeated too after each suspension. During the eighteen years of the council's existence, the news of its continued sessions must have penetrated to the most remote parts. It is claimed that few of the eastern bishops answered the invitation. This supposes that all the bishops should be necessarily present, and is a condition that was not required of preceeding councils. The authority of the Council of Nice was never questioned though the western bishops were absent. Not one of them was present at the Synods of Constantinople or Ephesus, but there was no hesitation in accepting and enforcing the decrees in the West as soon as they were known. In the light of these precedents, the objection to the Council of Trent is ridiculous, when it is considered that the signatures of the prelates present at the closing scene were supported not only by the adhesion of the absent but of the thousands who have been elevated to episcopal dignity since that date. A favorite objection is the alleged absence of freedom of discussion. It is not possible to conceive how a moral pressure upon over three hundred bishops could be maintained through eighteen years under the reign of four different popes without a protest of some kind having been placed on record. Yet no such protest is to be found. All documents point to the utmost liberty of discussion. The Fathers drew up of their own accord rules of procedure and carried on the business of the assembly according to their own regulations. Dogmatic decrees required unanimity of sentiment; disciplinary enactments passed by a majority of votes. The voice of the papal legates was never heard in the committees, in order not to influence them. There were undoubtedly pronounced party lines and at times the minorities evinced an aptitude for sharp dealing and obstructive tactics that would do honor to modern politics. But they thus rendered the service of an opposition, in allowing nothing to pass unchallenged.

The Council of Trent dealt with much that was not merely disagreeable but also most difficult. That it contained abilities requisite to realize success honest opponents themselves admit. "No general

council," writes Hallam, "ever contained so many persons of eminent learning and ability as that of Trent, nor is there any reason for believing that any other ever investigated the questions before with so much patience, acuteness, temper and desire of truth. The early councils, unless they are much belied, would not bear comparison in these characteristics. Impartiality and freedom from prejudice, no Protestant will attribute to the Fathers of Trent. But it may be said they had but one leading prejudice that of determining theological faith as handed down by tradition in the Catholic Church to their age." By the last remark the historian converts, whether intentionally or not, an unworthy reproach into a decided commendation. The "one leading prejudice, that of determining theological faith according to the tradition of the Catholic Church as handed down," links very appropriately with the spirited words of St. Augustine "that which they found in the Church," writes the great Doctor about the pastors of his time, "they left; that which they learned, they taught; that which they received from their fathers they transmitted to their children."

As certain men are flattered by the surname of "Great," which they have merited for manifest superiority of genius and surpassing splendour of exploits, so the Council of Trent deserves to be called not only the great, but the greatest of Ecumenical Councils. The reverence and gratitude of three centuries unanimously bestow that honor upon it. It was called together under a most curious combination of difficulties which instead of diminishing, rather conduced to enhance its superiority. Finally, those who figured in it, the Pope, the bishops assisted by enlightened theologians were animated by but one thought, namely, after mature deliberation and in all liberty to outline true Christian teaching and draw up a code of laws such as might be a perpetual source of strength and light for themselves as well as for the spiritual society which they governed. That they succeeded cannot be doubted; but on the exact measure of their success, history has yet much to say.

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