

John W. O'Malley. *Trent: What Happened at the Council*.

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This superb book by the Jesuit John W. O'Malley is long overdue, especially for an anglophone readership. The last general study of the council, Hubert Jedin's four-volume *Geschichte des Konzils von Trient*, appeared between 1949 and 1975. Only the first two volumes were translated into English in 1957 and 1961. In the intervening years, much specialized scholarship and a massive change in historiographical outlook have led O'Malley to produce a very different book — one that, given its modest price, should find a place not only on scholars' bookshelves but also on both undergraduate and graduate syllabi.

By his subtitle — a declarative statement, not a question — the author indicates that he will pursue a chronological approach. He begins with an introduction presenting the setting and the major players. Trent, formally under imperial control, was located on the Italian slope of the Alps. At the same time, therefore, it formally fulfilled Northern Europeans' longtime insistence that the council be held "in German lands" and was not far (three or four days by courier) from Rome. A town of seven to eight thousand inhabitants, Trent was poorly equipped for lodging and feeding as many as 2,000 men (the peak number in the final period): bishops, archbishops, abbots, heads of mendicant orders (the voting members); absentees' delegates; papal legates; and envoys of secular rulers — each with his entourage of theologians, hangers-on, servants, and horses. The town lacked adequate theological libraries. Threats of war were ever-present.

"The story of the Council of Trent is perforce as much a political as a theological and ecclesiastical story" (17). The principal actors included papal princes: Paul III in the first period (1545–47), Julius III in the second (1551–52), Pius IV in the third (1562–63). Legates — Cardinals Giovanni Maria Del Monte, Marcello Cervini, and very briefly Reginald Pole in the first period; Cervini in the second; Ercole Gonzaga, Girolamo Seripando, Ludovico Simonetta, and Giovanni Morone in the third — reported to and received instructions from the pope, and managed the proceedings with an iron hand. Important secular rulers, whose envoys conveyed their priorities, included Emperors Charles V and Ferdinand I, Kings Francis I and Henry II of France, and King Philip II of Spain. Among the most influential theologians were the Augustinian Seripando and the Spanish Jesuits Diego Laínez and Alfonso Salmerón. One of the numerous myths that O'Malley succeeds in dispelling is that participants were of one mind. On the contrary, relationships between these actors were adversarial and dramatic.

Chapters 1 and 2 concern the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century prelude to the council. As a consequence of the Councils of Constance and Basel, popes persisted in fearing the specter of conciliarism. Before and after the Fifth Lateran Council, cardinals challenged papal predominance. That staple of undergraduate exams, "the Reformation happened because the church was corrupt," is another myth. As movements like the *Devotio Moderna* and flourishing confraternities, apocalyptic expectations of an angelic pope, and the careers of figures such as Jiménez de Cisneros and Erasmus demonstrate, "it could have happened only in a society passionately concerned with religion" (48). What sparked it was above all "a special configuration of political forces" (51) in the first two decades of the sixteenth century with the ascent to European thrones of three young monarchs: Charles I/V, Henry VIII, and Francis I.

Chapters 3–5 treat the three periods during which the council convened. At Charles V's insistence, each session (the technical term for formal promulgation of sets of decrees) — preceded by theologians' analyses, voting members' expressions of opinion, and plenary working sessions (general congregations) — treated one or a cluster of doctrinal issues and then reform issues, enumerated in appendix A. But

where do Luther and the other Protestants fit into the picture? True, the need to combat their doctrines precipitated the calling of the council. By 1545, however it had become “absolutely clear that . . . the problem was no longer disagreement over this or that doctrine. The Protestants had developed and appropriated an operational paradigm [and a form of discourse] that was incompatible with the corresponding [Scholastic] paradigm of the bishops and theologians at Trent” (156). There was no possibility that either side could yield to, compromise with, or even communicate with the other.

Much less was accomplished at Trent than has previously been claimed. Of its twenty-five sessions, “fewer than half were able to produce decrees of any substance” (248), and many major issues — missions, Scholasticism vs. humanism, Inquisition, war — were never addressed. A very limited number of conciliar initiatives fully bore fruit only in the very long term: the definition of bishops’ obligations and seminaries for the training of priests, for instance. Post-Trent, declarations and actions by such individuals as Pius IV and V, Catholic preachers, and above all Carlo Borromeo were much more influential.

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